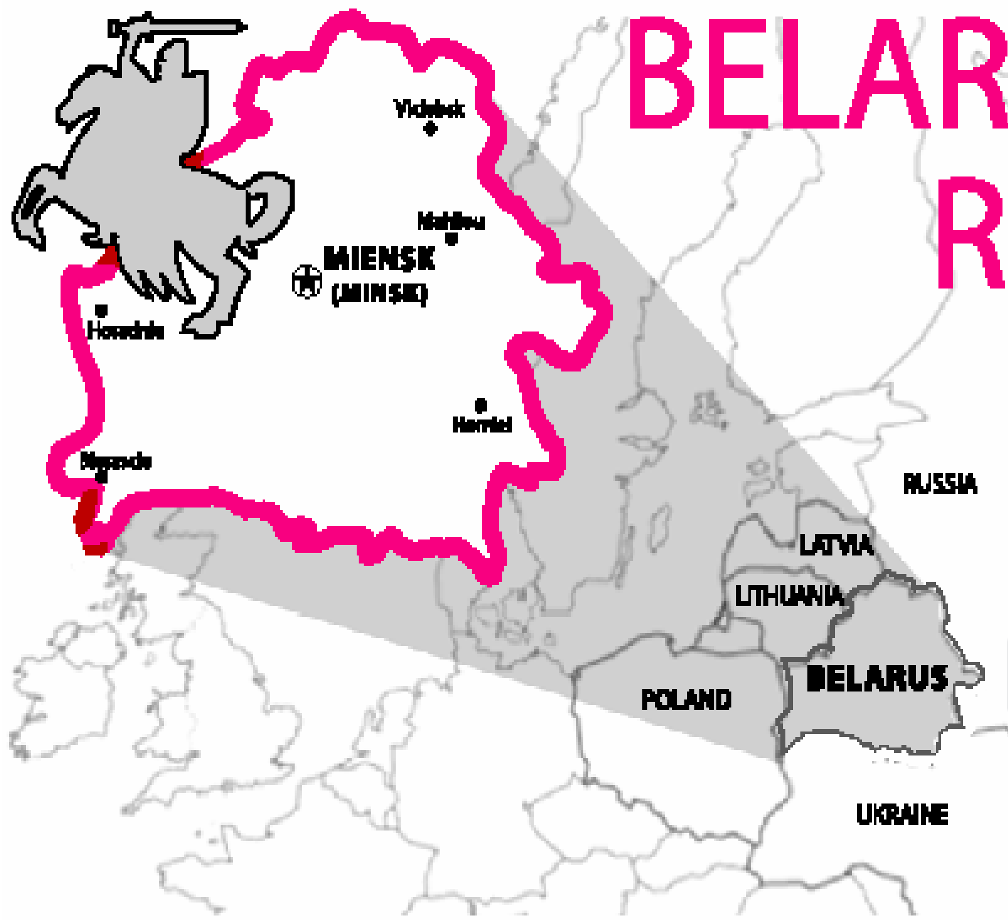
BELARUSIAN REVIEW



WINTER 2011
Volume 23, No. 4

In this issue

Guest EDITORIAL

Belarus' post-Soviet Alliances

Ukraine is trying to avoid following the Belarusian model of post-Soviet alignment which offers deep integration only with Russia. Unlike his Ukrainian colleagues, Aliaksandr Lukashenka has not managed to diversify his country's alliance choices.

Ukraine and Belarus represent contrasting models of post-Soviet development. Ukraine has been trying to avoid close political alliance with Russia since the 1990s. In contrast, for years Russia remained Minsk's main alliance partner. When the Union State was established in 1996, experts began to debate a possible restoration of the Soviet Union. This restoration, however, has proven to be somewhat exaggerated.

Close military and much closer economic cooperation between Minsk and Moscow, as well as the almost total energy dependency of Minsk on Moscow, have reduced the choices available to Minsk. Lukashenka has been an eager supporter of all integration efforts in the post-Soviet space under Russian guidance. Meanwhile, Moscow has been able and willing to demonstrate – especially after Vladimir Putin's accession to power – that its concept of energy superpower includes monopolization of energy supplies to the entire post-Soviet space, with Russia as the center and with the purpose of consolidating supplies to Europe. Thus, the loyalty of other post-Soviet states has been generously purchased with reduced gas prices. Unlike other energy-importing states in the post-Soviet space, Belarus, despite occasional disputes, was able to maintain strategic political relations with Russia while keeping possession of key Belarusian assets, even when Moscow was intent on acquiring them.

Due to the severe post-electoral economic crisis and political deadlock, the traditional West-or-Russia balancing strategy has proven ineffective this time and has forced Lukashenka to give concessions to Russia on Moscow's terms in exchange for a bail-out. The economic and political situation pushed Lukashenka to give up what he has fiercely defended from Moscow for the last several years– the most important of which is full control over the Belarusian gas pipeline system.

The paradox is that Minsk can not really sell its strategic assets to other parties, but only to Moscow. It has no ally other than Moscow. Minsk's spontaneous attempts to cooperate with the EU and other players – the United States, Venezuela or Georgia – generally do not go beyond building leverage for an attempt to construct equal relations with Moscow or get concessions from it.

This paradox exposes an even more important problem. Belarus is perhaps the best example of the fact that any attempt to construct post-Soviet cooperation on an equal basis is doomed. Moscow does not consider itself as standing on equal footing with former Soviet republics. It had watered down the EU offer to be included into the Eastern Partnership program as a partner state along with six other post-Soviet states. Moscow argued that its status is higher than that of a simple partner state – it is a strategic partner for the EU.

Such a policy of maintaining a number of politically weak states on the Russian periphery, rather than helping to strengthen them, guarantees that their dependence will bring loyalty. Thus, any attempt to construct an alliance in the post-Soviet space without Russian participation or with external players is seen by Moscow as a hostile act (e.g. GUAM). Nevertheless, only relations based on equality may bring a new level of cooperation in the post-Soviet space. Without it, the idea of Eurasian Union will become just another dysfunctional framework.

David Erkomaishvili

David Erkomaishvili is a doctoral candidate at Metropolitan University Prague/Institute of International Relations. His main areas of expertise include alliances, alliance theory, geopolitics, post-Soviet space.

From the Publisher

Matching Funds Project

The quarterly Belarusian Review is in its 23rd year of publication. Its Founder saw as its mission: "to provide English language information about Belarus for the world-wide readership." Such information included coverage of current political events and analysis, Belarusian culture and historical background.

Over the years it has added more authors, its editorial and support staff grew recently by attracting a number of younger colleagues. Considering the worsening political situation in Belarus, the need for this publication is now greater than ever.

Traditionally Belarusian Review has been funded through subscription by libraries and other academic institutions, and by individual readers. The generous contributions by individuals within the Belarusian diaspora community were critical. To contain printing costs, the publication was at first printed completely in the Czech Republic, air shipped to the United States for distribution in North America, and mailed out to subscribers mainly throughout Europe, including Belarus.

The natural attrition of the subscriber base within the diaspora, where the younger generation prefers to read it on-line, rather than to subscribe for a hard copy, made things difficult. The 40% fall in dollar's value compared to the Czech currency in the last five years, brought about a critical financial situation for the publication. And that, despite the economy measures taken, and the continuous search for new subscribers.

The following long term solution of establishing a matching funds project has been instituted. It calls for reaching out to the current larger contributors and other supporters interested in the publication's continued existence, to provide a one-time larger sum that would cover up to 50% shortfall in the annual budget. Such a contribution of S3,000 - $5,000 could be specified in the contributor's last will, or if the person's financial circumstances permit, to be provided as a current gift in one lump sum, or in an ongoing commitment, prorated over five or ten years. Such gifts could qualify for a tax deduction, and they'll be featured on the pages of Belarusian Review in a prominent manner.

For questions and details, please contact the Publisher in U.S. by phone, e-mail or postal address shown on the back page.

Concept of this Issue

The end of 2011 was marked by two significant events in the modern history of Belarus: one year since the last presidential elections in the country followed by the opposition rally crackdown and the twenty year anniversary of the collapse of the USSR, which led to the independence of the newly created independent state of Belarus.

The past twenty years have been challenging for the nation – becoming independent from the huge Soviet empire, establishing fully-functional state institutions with real powers and responsibilities while overcoming more or less successfully the economic crisis and restoring the Belarusian economy from scratch under the enormous burden of the Chornobyl-related expenses and costs.

Coming through this challenging path Belarus came to what it is now. For New Year 2012 we decided to take a look back at these twenty years of independence and understand the trends and choices that have determined the current situation of the country.

In his editorial **David Erkomaishvili** discusses Belarusian alliance choices after getting independence within the wider post-Soviet context.

A well-known Belarus-born Israeli professor, **Dr. Leonid Smilovitsky** provides a comprehensive overview of the Soviet religious policies in the post-war Belarus that largely determined the post-war developments of Belarusian society

Hanna Vasilevich analyzes Belarusian-Czech relations over the past twenty years and asserts scenarios for their future development within the context of Czech EU membership.

Kiryl Kascian analyzes the EU Eastern Partnership initiative developments since its implementation in 2009 till now on the basis of the content-analysis of the EU presidency programmes focusing on Belarus-EU relations.

A Belarusian from Latvia **Solvita Denisa Liepniece** focuses on the "Democratic Change in Belarus: A Framework for Action" project recently presented by leading international think tank experts.

A renowned Canadian specialist in Belarusian studies and author of *Belarus: a Denationalized Nation*, **Dr. David Marples** gives an interview in which he analyses the contemporary situation of Belarusian studies in North America and expresses his opinion on the role that Belarusian language should play in Belarus-related studies.

The end of the year was also marked by the publication of the book "*Belarus: the Last European Dictatorship*" by **Andrew Wilson,** which has already received substantial attention from scholars, analysts and the wider public. The book's importance is in the author's attempt to bring together history and political science and thus to link the past and present of Belarus. We offer our readership a review of this book made by **Kiryl Kascian and Hanna Vasilevich.**

FEATURES

One of Havel's Last Messages Was to Belarus

PRAGUE -- In one of his last public messages before his death on December 18, longtime dissident writer and former Czech President Vaclav Havel expressed solidarity with political prisoners in Belarus.

In a message given to RFE/RL's Belarus Service ahead of the one-year anniversary of a disputed presidential vote and resulting protests in Minsk, Havel's message was addressed to jailed presidential candidates Andrey Sannikau and Mikalay Statkevich and other opposition figures imprisoned during the crackdown.

"I will continue to use any opportunity in the future, together with my friends, to draw the international community's attention to the violations of basic civic rights in Belarus," Havel said in the letter.



Vaclav Havel (left) with a longtime Belarusian opposition leader, Ales Milinkevich (center), during a meeting in Prague.

Havel frequently spoke out against the postelection crackdown in Belarus and was a long-standing proponent of human rights and greater political freedoms in that country.

"I wish you all the best and freedom for your country," said Havel, one of the most powerful moral authorities of his generation in the former Soviet bloc and around the world.



In signing his letters, Václav Havel always added a small heart, as a symbol of love

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, December 19, 2011

He Was Our Advocate

Václav Havel was one of the greatest friends of democratic Belarus, stated Aliaksandr Milinkievič, one of the leaders of the Belarusian opposition and a former presidential candidate, in an interview for Lidové Noviny (Prague) Tereza Šupová conducted the interview.

Lidové Noviny (LN): What has Václav Havel meant for you? How do you remember him?

For me Václav Havel was a model politician. He combined in his person many excellent virtues, being a personality with an enormous moral authority. Yet he has managed to be politically very active. One often hears tat politics is a dirty business. I think that all Václav Havel's deeds contradict this opinion. He fought for dignity and decency in politics in the interest of his people and for preservation of humanistic values.

He has invited me several times to Prague to participate in Forum 2000. Despite the presence of many other prominent guests, he always found time to talk with me about Belarus and to discuss what can be done.

LN: What has the Czech president meant for the Belarusian opposition?

He was one othe greatest friends of the democratic Belarus. He was our speaker and advocate who inspired us. He accomplished much in support of Belarus and for its return to Europe. He was always convincing others that Europe is not complete without a democratic Belarus, that Belarus is an European nation.

He became the greatest authority for Belarusian democrats by being a symbol of successful transformation of the entire postcommunist world.

LN: One of the main Belarusian dissident groups, Charter 97 (and the internet server of this name) derived its name from Charter 77, fpunded by Václav Havel. How did this inspire you?

Citizens of Belarus need good and successful examples of attaining freedom. The Czech example is for us very important. Moreover, mutual relations between our two peoples have always been very strong and have a long history.

LN: In your opinion, what should be Havel's message for future generations?

That politics can be conducted differently, that moral values do count and that human rights, dignity and freedom are important in the world.

LN: Aren't you afraid that Václav Havel's death may be the end of an era? That after him there will be no other great fighter for human rights and freedom?

Considering what he has accomplished in his lifetime, Václav Havel is immortal. I hope that all of us will do everything possible to preserve his legacy.

Source: *Lidové Noviny* (Prague), December 20, 2011

Dissolution of the Soviet Union

As the Soviet Union careened toward collapse in 1991, no country was watching the unfolding events more closely than the United States. Washington had no control over events and didn't know whether the outcome would help or hurt U.S. national interests.

Today marks the 20th anniversary of the formal dissolution of the Soviet Union after nearly 70 years.

On December 8, 1991, the leaders of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus -- Boris Yeltsin, Leonid Kravchuk, and Stanislav Shushkevich -- met in the Belavezha Forest in Belarus and declared that the Union Of Soviet Socialist Republics had "ceased to exist" as "a subject of international law" and a "geopolitical reality."



Stanislau Shushkevich signs the Belavezha Accord for Belarus

The leaders signed the so-called Belavezha Accords, establishing a voluntary successor union called the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and effectively marking the end of the Cold War.

Between March 1990 and the end of 1991, all 15 Soviet republics had declared independence.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union followed moves aimed at increasing political and economic liberalization in the Communist Party-ruled state but eventually resulted in the end of communist rule there.

In 2005, then-Russian President Vladimir Putin described the collapse of the Soviet Union as "the greatest geopolitical catastrophe" of the 20th century.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, December 08, 2011

Quotes of Quarter

As reported by RIA Novosti on Deceber 15, Russian Prime Minister **VLADIMIR PUTIN** stated during a televised Q&A session with the nation:

"We have not achieved the level of integration as high as in the EU yet. But we are speaking about a possibility to move on to the creation of a **Eurasian Union** in the future, after launching a Single Economic Space … I hope we shall reach a **single currency** and macroeconomic policy alignment as well."

HELSINKI COMMISSION NEWS

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

Belarus Democracy and Human Rights Act of 2011 Passed in Congress

December 20, 2011

Washington—Legislation authored by Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe (U.S. Helsinki Commission) Chairman Rep. Chris Smith (NJ-04) responding to the Belarusan government's latest crackdown on human rights that began with the fraudulent December 19, 2010 Belarusan election, was passed by the House of Representatives today by a voice vote. Since last year's fraudulent election, the Belarusan government of Alexander Lukashenka, infamous for heading "Europe's last dictatorship," has stepped up its campaign of repression against human rights and democratic activists.

President Obama has signed the bill on January 3, 2012

Quotes of Quarter

As published in the Congressional Record of December 19, Representative **CHRIS SMITH** stated:

"I especially want to thank Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee **JOHN KERRY** and Senator **LUGAR** for their cooperation … and the Chairperson of the House Foreign Affairs Committee **ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN** for her leadership, and **HOWARD BERMAN**, as well as Speaker **JOHN BOEHNER** and **ERIC CANTOR**, for bringing this legislation (Belarus Democracy and Human Rights Act of 2011) to the floor."

The Chairperson of the House Foreign Relatons Committee **ILEANA ROS-LEHTINEN** paid a moving tribute to the former Czech President **VACLAV HAVEL**, a true friend of Belarus: "As he eloquently said after the Velvet Revolution that brought liberty to his people:

``None of us know all of the potentialities that slumber in the spirit of the population, or all the ways in which that population can surprise us when there is the right interplay of events.''

Eastern Partnership Deadlock: Is there a Solution?

By Kiryl Kascian

Introduced by Poland and Sweden, the EU Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative was launched during the Czech EU Presidency. The official inauguration of the EaP was made during the Eastern Partnership Summit in Prague where on May 7, 2009 a special declaration in the name of involved parties was adopted. The essence of the EaP is to bring thr six countries of strategic importance covered by this initiative – Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine – closer to the EU. Aimed at improving political and economic relations, the EaP initiative may potentially contribute to the democratization and economic liberalization of the partner countries, particularly by promoting good governance and rule of law, as well as combating corruption. Moreover, the idea of the EaP in light of the non-inclusion of Russia as a partner in this initiative may be regarded as the first real attempt of the EU to view these countries outside the context of the Russian sphere of interests.

Even though these six participating countries are treated by the EU on a case-by-case basis, the formalization of their relations with the EU embodied in the EaP may be regarded as reflecting a real understanding of the importance for the EU of the six countries that appeared on the political map. only some 18 years ago.

However, the idea to bring these six countries under the common EaP's umbrella found them in different stages of intensity in their relations with the EU — based both on geopolitical preferences of each country as well as on the interest in them by the EU and its member states. Therefore, the very common umbrella may be viewed as nothing else but an attempt by the EU to play the role of a regional leader that supervizes and assists in the development of its neighbours securing them on a friendly, stable and predictable path. This thesis may be backed by the aforementioned and intentional exclusion of Russia from this initiative, which apparently could have raised the interest in these six countries, their societies and cultures.

Within the tones of EaP-related analyses and reviews there are many approaches of measuring the effectiveness of the EaP. It seems that the contextual analysis of two types of documents coming from the EU (i.e. the Work Programmes of the EU Presidencies beginning with the Czech and following ones, and related to the EaP in general or its member-states in particular and the 18-month programmes of the Council of the European Union) might be the most objective measurement of the EU policies. Application of such an analysis enables testing of whether there is any continuity in the EU's policies toward the six members of the EaP and whether there is coherence between the EU and the EaP countries' approaches toward the EaP initiative to eliminate often politically motivated here-and-now events from the discourse.

Despite the introduction of the term "Eastern Partnership" and the differentiation of eastern and southern dimensions in the EU's relations with neighbouring countries, the 18-month Programme of the French, Czech and Swedish Presidencies did not go beyond the option of the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) on this issue. Nevertheless, the need for the enhancement of cooperation in the eastern dimension may be seen as a positive development even though limited within the ENP and thus insufficient.

The Working Programme for the Czech EU Presidency has defined the EU relations with the six countries currently involved in the EaP as a priority for the Union. This conclusion is derived not only from the fact that the EaP initiative was listed first among EU's external relations and was defined as priority. The ENP's insufficiency for the EU relations with its Eastern neighbours and the need for a "regionalized" approach toward them were reasonably concluded and the expected short-term perspectives of the Union's relations with each of its six Eastern partners were sketched. Therefore, one can regard the Czech EU Presidency Working Programme as a solid justification regarding the EaP implementation and also a practicable scheme for future relations with each of the six partner countries. The Czech EU Presidency Working Programme also followed the 18-month Programme of the French, Czech and Swedish Presidencies — clarifying and expanding its provisions.

All measures listed in the Swedish EU Presidency programme implied enhanced cooperation on economic, societal, political and security issues which in practice meant a coherent continuation of the Czech EU Presidency's approach and undertakings and enhanced implementation of the 18-month Programme of French, Czech and Swedish Presidencies.

Summing up the contents of the Programme of the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies we can conclude that the EaP is regarded strictly as a part of the ENP with all the relevant consequences. Indeed, the EaP region is proclaimed as one of strategic importance for the EU and the Union's primary focus in these partner countries is drawn toward "promoting stability, good governance and economic development." As it was mentioned above, the implementation of these policies requires more coherent involvement of the EU with the potential increase of its influence in the EaP countries. However, contrary to the previous 18-month Programme, this Programme neither distinguishes the EaP countries according to their progress (in the case of Ukraine) nor applies any conditions because of the political situation (in the case of Belarus). Despite more solid and precise contents of the Programme requiring more involvement of the EU in the EaP countries, the wording of the Programme is clear enough to conclude that all goals set up by the EU have a long-term perspective.

The Spanish contribution is an attitude toward the EU's relations with EaP countries embodied in the Working Programme which may be formulated as "consider Russia" as the willingness to encourage Russia's participation in Eastern Partnership programmes within the European Neighborhood Policy framework was encouraged. Such an approach diminishes the very idea of the EaP initiative, since the EaP could potentially become dominated by Russia's interests in this case. Accordingly, should Russia be included in it the EaP, it might become a tool for spreading Russia's influence in all six current EaP members. Thus, the Spanish EU Presidency may be characterized by different priorities and seen as a considerable rollback of the EaP initiative which may be regarded as a coherent continuation of Czech and Swedish EU Presidencies.

The Belgian EU Presidency Programme regarding the EaP may be evaluated as a rollback, compared even with the Spanish EU Presidency Working Programme. Moreover, formulations of the Belgian EU Presidency Working Programme offer very little compared with the circumspective but still rather ambitious 18-month Programme of the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies.

The Hungarian EU presidency viewed the EaP countries as strategic partners within the EU approach of "tailor-made strategies on individual partners" which again proves the application of the case-by-case basis and consequently marginalises the added value of the entire EaP initiative. During the Hungarian EU presidency the expected second EaP summit was to take place in May 2011 as "one of the highlights of the Hungarian Presidency" to mark "the ongoing review of the ENP." This, however, did not occur as the summit was rescheduled to take place under the auspices of the Polish EU presidency and thus within the next Polish-Danish-Cypriot trio of EU presidencies. Thus,. despite a quite ambitious agenda that seemed to qualitatively improve the rollback of the Spanish and Belgian EU presidencies, the summit has not met its declared EaP-related goals. Simultaneously, the failure of the Hungarian EU presidency to achieve EaP-related goals also meant the EU's failure to practically implement the EU-related provisions of the 18-month Programme of the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian Presidencies. Hence, despite the promising start of the EaP initiative under the previous EU trio, the entire 1.5 years of the Spanish, Belgian and Hungarian EU presidencies may be seen as a failure of the EU to clearly define its priorities toward the EaP partner counties, and resulted in a waste of time and exposure of the Union's inability to effectively implement the results-oriented programmes meeting the needs and demands of the EaP countries that could have demonstrated the declared EU openness toward these countries.

Thus, the second EaP summit was to take place in a situation in which, on one hand the EaP had never become a priority for the EU politics, and on the other hand, we could still hardly speak about a common EU Foreign policy. The EaP was fostered by those countries whose geopolitical interests lay with the EaP area whereas the EU countries with different strategic priorities were not willing to equally contribute to the EaP development.

The Summit in Warsaw that took place on September 29-30, 2011, was just another example of this disjointed approach. First, the number of participating leaders from the bigger EU member states was rather modest. Second, the events in the Mediterranean neighborhood caused by the "Arab spring" attracted much more of the attention of both politicians and analysts. Third, the continuing economic crisis in the EU also superseded the topic of relations with the still quite unknown Eastern EU neighbourhood.

The failure of the summit and the EU policies may be measured by the Belarus-related events in Warsaw. First, the Belarusian delegation left the summit after the scandal concerning the Belarusian ambassador to Poland Viktar Hajsionak, who was sent by Belarusian officials as the head of the country's delegation instead of Foreign Minister Siarhiej Martynaŭ as initially planned by the organizers. One may argue whether such a demarche could have occurred had the Belarusian delegation been headed by Martynaŭ. But one thing is obvious — it neither contributed to the re-emergence of the EU dialogue with the official Minsk nor shattered Lukašenka's confidence in his powers. Second, Belarusian diplomacy successfully lobbied the five other EaP countries to block the paragraph of the Summit's Joint Declaration that condemned Belarus. As a result, it was separately adopted as a resolution backed only by the EU side. It implies that collaboration among the EaP countries has so far its own standards, often different from those of the EU and thus proves the inefficiency of the EU as a mod-

erator in relations among the EaP countries. Third, the so-called "modernization package for a democratic Belarus" of $9 billion announced by the Polish authorities on behalf of the EU under three conditions (release and rehabilitation of the political prisoners, maintenance of the dialogue with the opposition and organization of the next parliamentary elections in compliance with the OSCE standards) raises the question of its reliability. In other words, what are the sources of these $9 billion in light of the continuing economic crisis in the EU? Additionally, this offer seems to be an attempt to exploit a difficult economic situation in Belarus and overbid Russia. But isn't the political price for the Belarusian authorities too high to even consider it? It is, particularly considering the Russian factor that does not require Belarusian authorities to share the power with other actors and is ready to work immediately. Thus, in any case, the situation is favorable neither for the Belarusian regime, nor for the country's pro-European civic society: the former is turned even closer to Moscow's sphere of influence while the latter may have become the object of further oppression as a part of Belarus-EU political antagonism.

Despite the uniqueness of the Belarusian case, this situation puts some additional questions regarding the core contents of the EaP offer to the partner countries in a long-term perspective. First, none of the documents clearly indicated prospective EU membership perspective for any of the six partner countries. Thus, the prospective EU membership – the aspired goal for some countries (particularly, Georgia and Ukraine) and a potential political alternative for the others — has never been officially regarded as even a long-term prospect. Accordingly, the carrot offered by the EU to the EaP countries was nothing but a potential assistance in political democratization and economic liberalization, particularly by promoting good governance and rule of law as well as combating corruption. But considering the political and economic situations in the six partner countries the question may be raised whether most if not all of them are ready to accept such an offer. Second, the maintenance of a sort of cooperative alliance among the EaP countries under the guidance of the EU does not seem to be an efficient idea since the bilateral (and multilateral) relations among these countries (with the exception of Armenian-Azerbaijani relations) are at least sustainable if not of a partnership character. Moreover, the current political leaders of the EaP countries basically share the same political culture, which makes it easier for them to understand each other's needs without an intermediary . Finally, the Russian factor within the context of the EaP remains an important issue because of the quite obvious advantage Russia could have in the EaP space (with the exception of Georgia). A comparison of the EU and Russian policies toward the EaP countries may be generalized as "sometime in the future if deserved at all" vs. "starting here and now". In other words, if the political EU integration, even though quite attractive for significant proportions of the EaP countries' population, it is still viewed as something in the abstract future, The Russian factor in the politics of the EaP countries (particularly within the context of Vladimir Putin's integrationist rhetoric) is the reality which should be already taken into account. Thus, the question remains whether the EU, with its ongoing economic crisis is ready to give up its restraint toward the EaP countries and offer them the real carrot of prospective EU membership and whether this carrot would still be attractive to the EaP countries?

ECONOMY

Belarus Currency Crisis: Is It Over Or Just Beginning?

By David Marples

On October 20, the National Bank of Belarus decided to dispense with a system of different exchange rates by restoring a single rate and in the process devaluing the Belarusian ruble (BLR) from 4,930 to the dollar to 8,680 to the dollar, a move that had been widely predicted, though experts were divided as to whether this was a stopgap measure or the beginning of a more responsible economic policy on the part of the authorities.

The devaluation of 189 percent reduced salaries, which had been hiked prior to the presidential elections last December, led to a monthly average of $260. The chair of the National Bank, Nadezhda Ermakova, expressed her belief that the move would strengthen the currency and lead to a rise in the circulation of foreign currency since the two factors impeding it have now been removed, namely the need to sell foreign currency at levels lower than market rates and taxation of the difference between market and official rates. In theory, the currency level is now determined by supply and demand, with the National Bank standing on the sidelines. Currency transactions, Ermakova maintained, could now be conducted freely, although those buying foreign currency would be required to show identification (www.belmarket.by, October 24-30).

Lukashenka's experiment of maintaining a state-run economy based on subsidies and favored treatment from Russia would appear to be over

Earlier in 2011, when the currency was also devalued, the National Bank tried to circumvent a crisis by simply printing money, but this only produced high inflation rates that are expected to reach 118 percent over the year. In 2008-2010, the exchange rates could be maintained with the help of external loans from Russia and the International Monetary Fund, but these funds had dried up by 2011, and the single source of revenue was the Eurobond sale last January. The government now seeks to keep inflation to around 20 percent in 2012. Bank officials also believe that the government will need to freeze wage increases and revisit the issue of supporting weak state enterprises and public projects (www.tut.by, October 21). In short, the Lukashenka experiment of maintaining a state-run economy based on subsidies and favored treatment from Russia would appear to be over.

Several questions arise. First, why did the bank take so long to introduce a single rate? Second, will the exchange rate now stabilize or is it likely to see further wild fluctuations in one direction or another? Third, will the introduction of a single currency rate really ensure economic revival or even survival – keeping in mind the re-

cent doomsday scenarios offered by Western economic experts?

Ermakova commented on the need to prepare psychologically for such a move, the focus on financing state programs, and the more obvious decision to wait and see how the April experiment of multiple rates might work. Success also depended on the government obtaining more loans to bolster the foreign currency reserves, as they had become practically depleted. Belarus is reliant on the remainder of a $3 billion loan from the Eurasian Economic Community, $1 billion from Russia's Sberbank, and some $2.5 billion for the sale of the remaining 50 percent share of Beltransgaz to Russia's Gazprom, which is anticipated to take place in November. Meanwhile, the general public will suffer the consequences of the salary reduction, which according to analyst Uladzimir Tarasou, is a consequence of the government seeking to apply the minimum salaries on which the population can survive (www.belmarket.by, October 24-30).

Economic analysts' prognoses on the future rate are mixed. Syarhey Chaly assessed the devaluation as a positive move as the rates are now determined by market factors rather than the National Bank. The rate of devaluation was in fact more than was needed for macro-economic equilibrium and now exports are rising and currency revenues increasing. The ruble is likely to strengthen. Barys Zhaliba also sees the development as positive, but believes that the potentially negative consequences could be price rises for gas and imported medicines. Much now depends, in his view, on the anticipated incoming loans and revenue and whether they materialize (www.svaboda.org, October 21).

Irina Krylovich maintains that the exchange rate could fall to 8,000 BLR by the New Year, noting the importance the Eurasian Economic Community loan, the way the rates of exchange are formed on the Stock Exchange, and the results of the forthcoming meeting between Presidents Alyaksandr Lukashenka and Dmitry Medvedev (in Moscow in the second half of November). Leanid Zayko of Strategiya considers that the future is highly unstable and that in uncertain situations, people tend to buy foreign currency. Leanid Zlatnikau, another well-known economist, considers that the rate could rise to 12,000 BLR to the dollar if loans are not forthcoming, but could drop to only 7,500 if they arrive as anticipated (Belorusskaya Delovaya Gazeta, October 28).

Mikhail Kavaliou, Dean of the Faculty of Economics at the Belarusian State University, offers another evaluation. He advocates a strict monetarist policy that is not sidelined by a focus on increasing imports, which, along with consumer loans, could lead to further devaluations. He also does not exclude the possibility that the National Bank could sell more gold reserves to stabilize the exchange rates and stresses that printing of money should end (*Zvyazda*, November 1). Most analysts thus appear to accept that the second devaluation of the year was necessary and that a single exchange rate is to be preferred to the chaotic situation that prevailed over the summer

Another factor to be considered is the new prices for imports of Russian gas that need to be established for 2012 and subsequent years as the current agreement ends on December 31. The ideal for the Belarusian government would be a reduction of the price to $180 per thousand cubic meters (tcm), a decrease of around 25 percent. Belarus would also like to see the price for Russian oil dropped from around $40 to $45 per ton to around $20. These prices would allow for an accumulation of foreign currency reserves to as much as $6 billion, as compared to current holdings of $4.7 billion and the government's ideal target of $10 billion. This accumulation would assist with the rise in payments of external debt by 2013 (www.tut.by, October 28). It seems unlikely, however, that Moscow would be so accommodating without some returns, such as the sale of coveted Belarusian companies at favorable prices. Russia may also soon have the Nord Stream pipeline as an option to supply gas to EU countries that could circumvent Belarus altogether –perhaps even eliminating the need to purchase the remainder of Beltransgaz (Belarusskiy Partizan, October 28).

Thus, at present, there are far too many imponderables to state unequivocally that Belarus can overcome its financial predicament. The situation is grave, but not yet terminal. The old system has essentially fallen apart but it is unclear with what it will be replaced, or whether the government will choose the path recommended by economic advisers at home and abroad, namely a more stringent policy that could bring considerable hardships to a population that has already suffered a very difficult year.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 8 Issue: 214, November 18, 2011

BELARUS' FORUM



Leading Rights Activist Jailed For 4 1/2 Years

In a case condemned by the European Union as politically motivated, a Belarusian court has handed down a four-and-half year prison sentence to prominent human right activist **Ales Byalyatski**.

Byalyatski, the leader of the banned Vyasna (Spring) human rights center, was found guilty of tax evasion. In a hearing on November 24, attended by EU and U.S. diplomats, the court also ordered the confiscation of his property.

"Vyasna will not be stopped," said Byalyatski after his verdict was announced. The 49-year-old rights activist's lawyer says he will appeal the sentence.

Byalyatski's wife Natalya Pinchuk told journalists that the verdict was "predictable."

"In general, the sentence could be expected, she said. "The tone of comments in official media did not offer hope of a more lenient sentence...I must say that we knew events could possibly develop this way even before Ales was arrested. It was our conscious choice. We were getting ready for the arrest of Ales one month before it took place."

International Criticism Of Verdict

Robert Golanski, a spokesman for the President of the European Parliament, Herman Van Rompuy, told RFE/RL that the parliament "considers the charges against Byalyatski in the trial as [being] politically motivated and unjustified

Golanski also called on "Belarusian authorities to immediately and unconditionally release Mr. Byalyatski as well as all political prisoners still in custody and for all the charges against them to be dropped."

He added that "the European Parliament stands by the side of Belarusian people."

Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, a member of the European Parliament from Poland, said the case and the verdict were "appalling" and "scandalous." He claimed that the judges were acting "under a clear political instruction from the very top."

Poland's Foreign Ministry said Byalyarski's sentence "is a sentence for human rights in Belarus."

The chairman of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Azubalis, condemned the sentence in a statement issued on November 24 and said Byalyatski's case "must be seen as part of a broader pattern of harassment and intimidation of human rights defenders in Belarus."

Lithuanian, Polish Bank Accounts

The tax charge stems from Byalyatski's reported use of personal bank accounts in Lithuania and Poland to receive funding from international donors in support of human rights activities in Belarus.

The two countries later expressed disappointment that their data had been used to incriminate the human rights defender, and issued formal apologies for unintentionally cooperating with the regime in Minsk.

Byalyatski had been circulating reports about the authorities' crackdown on peaceful protests since the disputed presidential election in December 2010, which returned President Alyaksandr Lukashenka to power.

Byalyatski was arrested on August 4 and subsequently charged with tax evasion.

The prosecution could have asked for a jail term of up to seven years.

Professor Valery Saykouski stated that in 2007-2010, a total of some 567,000 euros ($765,915) was transferred to accounts belonging to Byalyatski and his organization in banks in Poland and Lithuania. Saykouski said Byalyatski concealed data about the balance in those accounts and thereby committed a crime.

Byalyatski's lawyer Zmitser Layeuski had disputed the prosecution's case.

Byalyatski's 'Rights Were Violated'

Layeuski said that his client's rights were violated during the trial as none of his requests had ever been granted. He said there was no official explanation for the monitoring of Byalyatski's financial activities.

"In fact," Layeuski said, "all the witnesses who testified for the prosecution gave data that prove Byalyatski's innocence."

"What we know now is the fact that Byalyatski has some bank accounts abroad that received some sums of money, of which a certain amount was used by Byalyatski for his human rights activities, that is all. There is no evidence that he did anything wrong," Layeuski added.

"The amounts sent to Byalyatski's accounts were not grants, but loans he had to return. The money did not belong to Byalyatski, but was used for the activities of his organization, namely for business trips, special projects, seminars, etc., and therefore those amounts are not subject to tax," Layeuski said.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, November 24, 2011

Minsk Subway Bombers Sentenced to Death

A Belarusian court has convicted and sentenced to death two men for a bomb attack in the Minsk subway in April that killed 15 people and wounded around 200 others.

Judge Alyaksandr Fedortsov read out the 114-page verdict in its entirety to a packed courtroom in the closely watched trial of defendants Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzislau Kavalyou.

Belarus is the only European state that carries out executions.

In the same verdict, the men were also convicted of a string of violent attacks prior to the subway tragedy.

Many observers were shocked at the sentencing, which came following a trial that was widely regarded as flawed. Eduard Kukan, a member of the European Parliament from Slovakia, called the development "tragic" and said the West must do more to restrain the behavior of Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka.

"[It's] tragic news because it seems that all the efforts of the European institutions and world institutions to try to get Lukashenka to his senses do not work," Kukan said. "So I think that it will be necessary to use stronger measures."

Through her spokeswoman, Maja Kocijancic, EU foreign-policy chief Catherine Ashton urged Belarus to join the rest of Europe in banning the death penalty.

"The European Union opposes the use of capital punishment under all circumstances," Kocijancic said. "We believe that the death penalty is a cruel and inhuman punishment that does not allow any reversal, and it fails to provide a deterrence to any criminal behavior and is an unacceptable denial of human dignity and integrity."

Interfax reported that Kanavalau's family intends to apply for a pardon.

The court convicted Kanavalau of planting the bomb in Minsk's busy Oktyabrskaya subway station on April 11 and found both men guilty of constructing and preparing the explosive. During the trial, prosecutors said the men chose the central station in order "to kill as many people as possible."

Delivering the verdict, the judge read out the names of all of those killed or injured in the subway explosion.

The trial began on September 15. Kanavalau initially admitted to carrying out the April bombing in Minsk but then refused to make an opening or closing statement or to testify in his own defense.



In addition, Kanavalau was convicted of carrying out another bombing in Minsk on July 4, 2008, that injured 54 people. Kavalyou was convicted of assisting in that attack as well.

Kanavalau was also convicted of carrying out a terrorist bombing in Vitsebsk in September 2005 that injured nearly 50 people.

Kanavalau and Kavalyou, both 25, are factory workers from the city of Vitsebsk and have been friends since childhood. Prosecutors offered no motive for the attacks, other than that the two men sought to disrupt the country's social order.

Almost as soon as the sentence was read in Minsk, municipal workers in Vitsebsk began emptying out the basement where the two men purportedly constructed the explosives.

Unclear Motive

Speaking to journalists on November 28, Kavalyou's mother, Liubou Kavalyova, urged the authorities to spare her son's life.

"We don't have the right to make mistakes," she said. "Too many questions have been left unanswered in the court."

Critics said prosecutors presented scant evidence of the men's involvement in the bombing.

Although it was alleged that Kanavalau was near the explosion, there is no evidence that he was physically harmed. In addition, an analysis by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) of security-camera footage of the scene concluded that it was impossible to tell if the man shown was the defendant and that the footage might have been edited.

No physical evidence connected the two men to the explosives.

Excuse For Crackdown?

The April subway bombing triggered a harsh crackdown on dissent by Lukashenka's government.

Minsk-based political scientist Yury Chavysau told RFE/RL that the trial had raised as many questions as it had answered. He said some people believed government structures may have orchestrated the attack to justify further repression.

"People think that the authorities are guilty in what happened and consider Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzislau Kavalyou as two scapegoats, as victims of unjust actions by the state," Chavysau said.

Former Belarusian KGB Lieutenant Colonel Valery Kostka was also critical of the trial and the verdicts.

"Not all doubts and issues have been resolved. Such a harsh sentence will undermine confidence in the authorities even more -- this time, by undermining the judicial system," Kostka said.

"Because this example and the example of many previous trials shows that the judicial system in Belarus does not protect people but follows political instructions. And the justice system is being turned into a punishment organ of the dictatorship."

written in Prague by Robert Coalson based on reporting by RFE/RL's Belarus Service and RFE/RL's Brussels correspondent Rikard Jozwiak

Quotes of Quarter

Independent newspaper *Nasha Niva* described the following question by correspondent of *Narodnaya Volya* **MARYNA KOKTYSH** as being the clearest, and the most courageous of the whole December 23 press-conference.

MARYNA KOKTYSH: "Why couldn't you act as a real man? Simply, right here? Will you release Sannikau, Statkevich? You had pardoned others who stole millions, so why can't you pardon your political opponents? Is it really important for you as a man to have them get on their knees before you ? And, second (question). You have stated that you'll step down, as soon as you learn that the people are against you? And, how will you learn that? There is no independent television in the country. Independent sociological opinion polls are banned. A law has been enacted, that no more than three persons can gather in public. Thus, how will you learn that the people no longer want you?"

ALEXANDER LUKASHENKA responded with some double-entendre humor which the journalist sharply cut off. He then proceeded for the next 15 minutes, by referring at first to the early (democratic) 1990's, and concluding:

"I will not allow such chaos."

Regarding his stepping down, **LUKASHENKA** declared:

I'll step down, if I lose the election. As soon as the people tell me NO in the election, I'll step down. As soon as the majority so votes, the next day Lukashenka will be no more."

Czech-Belarusian Relations: Last 20 Years

By Hanna Vasilevich

20 years after the Velvet Revolution and the collapse of the Soviet Union have been characterized by significant changes in the regions of Central and Eastern Europe.. The Czech Republic separated from Slovakia, changing from the former Soviet ally Czechoslovakia into an independent country with its own interests. In 2004 it became a member of the European Union. As for Belarus, though it was one of the USSR's most developed republics, in the beginning of its independence it underwent economic shock therapy, which negatively affected most of the country's population. Thus, the beginning of the 1990s in Belarus was characterised by the transformation to democracy under harsh economic challenges. Along with these difficulties Belarus had to maintain its relations with the world.

Establishment of bilateral relations between the Republic of Belarus and the Czech Republic dates back to January 5, 1993 when the Czech Republic was officially recognised by Belarus. Simultaneously, the Diplomatic relations between the two countries were established simultaneously.[1] In 1994 the embassy of the Czech Republic in Minsk and the embassy of the Republic of Belarus in the Czech Republic were opened.[2] From the very beginning the Czech embassy in Minsk had minimal working personnel due to the then-existing visa-free regime between the two countries. However, after 2000, when visas for Belarusian citizens were introduced, the Czech embassy staff increased.

The legal basis for relations between Belarus and the Czech Republic in various areas of cooperation had to established anew after the establishment of the bilateral relations because Belarus did not embrace the continuity of the Soviet Union's former international agreements.[3] That is why the number of mutual legal agreements is not as high as it potentially could have been, even though it gradually increases. Belarusian authorities characterise the current number of eighteen Belarusian-Czech intergovernmental and interagency legal agreements as developed since it contains a block of basic economic agreements between the two states.[4]

The Czech party characterises the current state of bilateral Belarusian-Czech relations as correct, emphasizing that the views of the two parties on certain political issues do not always coincide.[5] At the same time it is being constantly underscored by the Czech authorities that "*the Czech Republic is constantly interested in strengthening the Belarusian statehood and development of standard relations with a sovereign and democratic Belarus, in correct positive and mutually beneficial contacts, particularly in the sphere of economy*."[6]

Such a formulation implies that the primary interest of Czech authorities in Belarus lies in the economic sphere. Additionally, Czech interest in an independent and democratic Belarus should be stressed. Finally, it may be concluded that the Czech Republic does not list Belarus among its strategic partners, regional allies or anything similar, and consequently does not strive for any special type of bilateral relations exceeding the standard ones.

The described situation indicates lack of understanding of the Belarusian specifics by the Czech authorities. Even though the two nations have traditional historical connections — the first Belarusian book was published in 1517 in Prague, and Czechoslovakia hosted a large Belarusian émigré community during the interwar period — they rarely have been applied in bilateral relations. For a while, before Lukašenka there were attempts to apply these ties in bilateral relations, which ceased after he took over power in Belarus. Despite the elimination of this cultural aspect from bilateral relations, the attitude of Belarus toward the Czech Republic and vice versa did not change after Lukašenka became president of Belarus.

Czech accession to the EU has brought additional facets to Belarusian-Czech relations. Accordingly, while forming its policy toward Belarus, the Czech Republic considers its status as an EU member-state. That is why the development of domestic policies in Belarus is being observed by the Czech Republic from the EU perspective and, more importantly, the EU's approach toward Belarus is being largely shared by the Czech Republic.[7] Within the EU the Czech Republic has became one of the most active proponents of promoting democracy and human rights in Belarus.

In fact, the qualitative change in the Czech foreign policy after the country's accession to the EU should be further analyzed. One should take into account the specific situation of Belarus and its authorities among the the European countries. Being heavily criticised for the lack of democracy and often being labelled as "Europe's last dictatorship", Belarus remains the only country in Europe whose authorities' legitimacy is being questioned.

It is largely accepted that nearly since its very accession to the European Union, the Czech Republic "*has earned a reputation for promoting human rights at every turn*."[8] Additionally, the EU membership from the very beginning was seen by the Czech authorities as an opportunity "*to influence a club with global clout, and throw Europe's weight behind democrats everywhere*" including Belarus.[9] Thus, one may find two facets to Czech accession to the EU — an attempt to use it as a tool to play globally and an opportunity to become a democratic advocate on a global scale. These two facets combined are particularly important in the case of the Belarus-EU relations where sometimes the "*EU diplomats describe the Czech Republic as out on a limb, even "unprofessional"* for asking uncomfortable questions about democratic values.[10] Thus, the Czech Republic in its attempts to advocate democracy promotion tries to go even further than the European Union that declares its readiness to facilitate its cooperation with Belarus "in the light of further developments towards the fundamental European values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law" putting the implementation of these values in Belarus as a condition for "the success of the progress" of Belarus-EU relations.[11]

On the other hand, regarding the EU's policy toward Belarus the role of the Czech Republic has profoundly proved itself on the eve of and during the Czech EU Presidency that lasted from January, 1 to June, 30 2009.

The Czech commitment is also recognised by the Belarusian authorities who note that in 2008 Belarusian-Czech relations saw visible positive dynamics in the sphere of the political cooperation. For example, the meetings between Belarusian and Czech foreign ministers Siarhiej Martynaŭ and Karel Schwarzenberg within the framework of the EU Troika consultations are mentioned.[12]

Further commitment of Czech authorities to Belarus-EU relations may be observed in the Czech EU presidency's Working Programme entitled "Europe without Barriers" and marked by the implementation of the EU Eastern Partnership initiative (EaP). This Programme not only considers the relations between the EU and six partner countries (including Belarus) a priority but also emphasizes the inefficiency of the existing ENP framework for the EaP region. Moreover, this programme contains special provisions regarding Belarus-EU relations. In the light of the perspective of improving the Belarus-EU relations, the participation of Belarusian authorities in the EaP opening summit and the very inclusion of Belarus in this initiative were accepted only conditionally. The improvement mentioned above was seen as a step-by-step process with two dimensions: political and societal. The political dimension was seen as an opportunity to establish a momentum for the comprehensive Belarus-EU dialogue while the societal dimension was aimed at supporting Belarusian civic society.

Belarusian authorities have reacted positively both to implementation of the Eastern Partnership initiative and the Czech commitment to it, acknowledging that the invitation of Belarus to participate in the EaP brought a new momentum to development of Belarusian-Czech dialogue. [13].Belarusian Foreign Affairs minister Siarhiej Martynaŭ considers the EaP initiative "a unique project in the way that it for the first time singles out all six Eastern European states from the overall context of the EU neighbourhood and focuses on them as a regional entity."[14] Therefore, the Belarusian state is interested in the initiative in a rather pragmatic way seeing it "as a result-oriented cooperation framework… that should serve pragmatic interests of all partner states and the Wider Europe in general by fostering sustainable development, economic and social modernisation in this part of the continent."[15] Belarusian authorities want to de-politicise the EaP initiative so that it will not become an instrument for struggling over the spheres of interest. A related issue is the free choice between "the integration into and equitable partnership with the European Union" which implies full-fledged cooperation between the EU and an EaP country regardless of its choice. More importantly, by applying this terminology the Belarusian minister speaks not only about a multi-speed EaP but also about the "European" perspective of EaP members which may potentially lead to their membership in the EU. To sum up, Belarusian authorities see the EaP in its current format as a mixed success and repeatedly emphasise their pragmatic approach toward the EaP initiative expecting from it a more practical content.[16]

Therefore, it is possible to conclude that the EaP initiative finds considerable support among both Belarusian and Czech authorities who consider it a solid framework for the elaboration of further bilateral relations between the countries and see huge potential in easing the bilateral cooperation into the EU cooperation framework, that the EaP is expected to become.

However, it is also necessary to evaluate the added value of the EaP from the EU perspective. A closer look at the Working Programmes of the EU Presidencies that took place after the Czech presidency proves that only the subsequent Swedish EU presidency might be regarded as "coherent continuation of the Czech EU Presidency approach and undertakings" while further Spanish and Belgian EU Presidencies could be "characterised by different priorities and seen as a considerable rollback of the EaP initiative."[17] Thus, it is possible to say that there is still no coherent policy of the EU toward Belarus within the EaP initiative since this initiative itself finds different interpretations by various EU countries depending on their regional preferences. Additionally, while the "Europeanisation" of bilateral relations between the Republic of Belarus and the Czech Republic (i.e. putting these relations into the EaP context) might start functioning and lead to certain facilitation of bilateral relations both on the state and societal levels, the realisation of these initiatives on an EU scale seems to be not yet implemented fully. In other words the EaP initiative itself and the EU policy toward Belarus might be characterized as fragmented and even inconsistent.

In their turn, the last presidential elections in Belarus on December 19, 2010 proved that there will be no regime change in the country and that at least in the next five years both the Czech Republic and the European Union will have to deal with Aliaksandr Lukašenka and his regime. The very existence of this regime in a European country remains a problem for the EU which in fact does not know how to handle it. Despite some liberalization prior to the 2010 presidential elections in Belarus, one may conclude that attempts to democratise Belarus either through Russia or through the EaP have failed.

Thus, the election of Lukašenka as the president of Belarus has not significantly influenced the bilateral Belarusian-Czech relations even though the historical component was eliminated. The most important event

---

1. Source: http://www.mzv.cz/minsk/ru/x2002_05_17/otnoshenia.html.

2, Ibid, see also: http://mfa.gov.by/ru/foreign-policy/bilateral/europe/f21c1859684ffd0e.html.

3. Source: http://www.mzv.cz/minsk/ru/x2002_05_17/otnoshenia.html.

4. Source: http://www.czech.belembassy.org/rus/new_page_80/copy_new1522/.

5. Source: http://www.mzv.cz/minsk/ru/x2002_05_17/otnoshenia.html

6. Ibid.

7. Ibid

8. Czechs with few mates, in: Economist, 30/08/2007, available at: http://www.economist.com/node/9725352?story_id=9725352.

9. Ibid.

having an impact on the relations between these two countries was Czech accession to the EU. Since its accession to the EU, the Czech Republic has become one of the leading EU advocates of democratisation in Belarus, though this campaign cannot be called successful.

Last presidential elections in Belarus showed that Europe will have to deal with the Lukašenka's regime. Characteristically, the elections have not been recognized as free and fair by the EU member-states (including the Czech Republic). It is not clear whether the Belarusian president will try to seek re-election in 2016 or a Russian-like scenario with an heir will be implemented. However, it is obvious that the Belarusian regime in the next ten years will hardly change. Therefore, both the Czech Republic and the EU will have to deal with the current regime in the near future.

Belarus provides a profound example of how European policy has failed. In fact, it seems that as early as the 1990s Belarus was "left" in the Russian sphere of interest and Europe had little interest in this country. Belarus in its turn showed neither interest in the EU nor in the NATO membership. Inclusion of the country into the EU Eastern Partnership initiative was accepted in Belarus from a pragmatic perspective but not as an instrument for struggling over the spheres of interest.

Thus, it might be concluded that Belarus-EU relations are based on a rational approach where Belarus seeks an exclusively economic cooperation. As for democracy and human rights, this problem is treated by the Belarusian authorities as an exclusively domestic issue. The international intrusion into the Belarusian internal policies over democracy and human rights is not welcomed by the Belarusian authorities, and affects Belarus-EU relations negatively.

The Belarusian regime attempts to level the country's relations with the EU so that Belarus will be treated by the EU as an equal partner and not as an applicant for membership, which would transfer certain levers of power to the EU. Belarusian accession to the EaP might be viewed as a m anifestation of rationality and pragmatism of the Belarusian authorities. In this context the post-electoral statements of Lukašenka made on December 20, 2010 are characteristic. Summing up the elections' results he underscored that Belarus "should not bend" to the wishes of the EU or the USA and will act exclusively in accordance with its own legislation.[18] Such statements can be characterised as an attempt to bring the Belarus-EU relations into the position of equality where one party does not submit itself to the orders of another. In the view of Belarusian authorities these relations must be based on the mutual recognition. In the case of the EU and the Czech Republic acting as advocates of democratization and human rights promotion in the region, such recognition of the legitimacy of Lukašenka's regime is a very different challenge.

Therefore, it seems that perspectives of the Belarusian-Czech relations will be limited mainly to cultural and educational issues. As for the economy, the Czech Republic could hardly be considered by Belarus an economic partner of priority.. Belarus in its turn does not want to cooperate on the issue of democratisation and

---

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Source: http://www.eeas.europa.eu/belarus/index_en.htm

12. Source: http://mfa.gov.by/ru/foreign-policy/bilateral/europe/f21c1859684ffd0e.html

13. Source: http://www.czech.belembassy.org/rus/new_page_80/new_page_89/.

14. Martynaŭ, S. Hopes and concerns over the Eastern Partnership- the Belarus' view, in: Baltic Rim Economies, 28/4/2010, p. 5.

15. Ibid.

16. See Vasilevich, H. Eastern Partnership: Case study of Ukraine and Belarus, available at: http://www.ecprnet.eu/databases/conferences/papers/901.pdf

17. See Kascian, K. Eastern Partnership: Critical Reflections, available at: http://www.ecprnet.eu/databases/conferences/papers/814.pdf

18. Source: http://www.president.gov.by/press104951.html#doc

HISTORICAL DATES

November 2 - Remembrance Day (Dziady)

The day for commemorating ancestors with a special family meal, dating from pre-Christian times and later associated with Christianity's All Souls' Day. .

Since the Belarusian Declaration of Sovereignty in July, 1990, **Dziady** became an occasion for patriotic demonstrations emphasizing the victims and heroes of the historical past. Such observances were led by the Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) and other groups and included marches to **Kurapaty**, a site near Minsk where mass executions took place during the Stalinist era.

November 1st through December 31, 1920
The Anti-Bolshevik Slucak Uprising

Anti-Bolshevik military action in the region of Slucak, organized by representatives of the Belarusan Democratic [National] Republic.

November 1830 through 1831

The national liberation uprising against the Russian empire and for the renewal of the *Recpaspalitaja (Republic) of Two Nations* (Poland and Litva)

November 3, 1882

The birthdate of **Jakub Kolas -** an outstanding Belarusian poet of the national renaissance era.

November 26, 1930

The birthdate of **Uladzimier Karatkievic -** a noted Belarusian writer of the Soviet era. Most of his works dealt with Belarus' history. Deceased in 1984

NEWS BRIEFS

September 14, 2011

Eleven more political prisoners released.

On 14 September, Lukashenka pardoned eleven more activists convicted in the mass riot case of the Ploscha events on 19 December 2010. They are Paval Vinahradau ("Tell the Truth" activist), Aliaksander Klaskouski Jr. (a former policeman), Uladimir Loban, Dzmitry Novik, Fiodar Mirzayanau, Aleh Fedarkevich, Dzmitry Bulanau, Aliaksandr Malchanau, Aliaxandr Atroshchenkau (Sannikov's press-secretary), Ilya Vasilevich and Mikita Likhavid ("For Freedom" movement activist). Most of the these individuals declare that they did not write pardon petitions to Lukashenka.

Source: Belarus Digest

September 19, 2011

China Lends Belarus One Billion Dollars

China has given cash-strapped Belarus a loan of one billion dollars and a grant of some 11 million, the Belarus parliamentsaid Saturday, quoting the head of the Chinese National People's Congress.

A statement said Wu Bangguo also announced agreementsto build a communications satellite, a paper factory and a hotel in Minsk in a meeting with leading members of the Belarus parliament.

Source: news.ninemsn.com.au

September 26, 2011

Standard & Poor's Downgrades Belarus Credit Rating

Standard & Poor's Ratings Services has lowered Belarus'sdebt rating to 'B/C' from 'B/B' with a negative outlook. The downgrade is being seen as leaving Belarus one step closer to default.

Standard & Poor's released a statement that said "the downgrade reflects our concerns over Belarus's ongoing dependence on external funding" and "we remain highly uncertain as to Belarus's ability to secure such funding."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

October 1, 2011

Belarus refuses to take part in Eastern Partnership Summit

According to special statement made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs., the organizers of the Eastern Partnership Summit have applied unexampled discriminative measures to Belarus.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs claims that the organizers have not invited the Belarusian leader to the summit. It is also stated that the participation of the head of the Belarusian delegation in the summit activities has been limited.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

October 3, 2011

Byalyatski nominated for Nobel Prize

A specially created organizational committee nominates Ales Byalyatski for Peace Nobel Prizefor 2011. It includes 29 people.

Among them there are Belarusian activists Alyaksandr Milinkevich (movement "For Freedom!") and Zhanna Litvina ("Belarusian Association of Journalits"), Russian human rights defender Lyudmila Alyakseeva, President of the International Human Rights Federation Suhair Belhasen, executive director of the non-governmental organization *Freedom House* David Kramer, President of the BNR Rada Ivonka Survila and others.

Source: European Radio for Belarus

October 5, 2011

Draft Amendments to Mass Events Law

The lower House secretly gave both readings to the bill in absence of reporters on October 3, the first day of its fall session.

The bill was not listed in the agenda of Monday`s sitting handed out to reporters ahead of the event and a statement announcing the passage of the bill was posted on the House`s website only on October 5.

The original draft of the bill said that the definition of picketing shall include "the joint mass presence of people in an appointed public place, including an open-air place, at an appointed time for doing a certain action or inaction, which is organized, among other methods, through the World Wide Web and other information networks for a public expression of political and public sentiments or protest."

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

October 7, 2011

Activist Sues President Over Nuclear Power Plant

ASTRAVETS, Belarus -- An antinuclear activist in western-Belarus is suing President Alyaksandr Lukashenka over plans to build a contentious nuclear power station there.

Mikalay Ulasevich, who helps to coordinate the "A Nuclear Power Station in Astraviec Is A Crime" campaign, told journalists on October 7 that he has submitted his lawsuit to the Supreme Court.

He said Presidential Decree No. 418 "On the location of a nuclear power station in Belarus" contradicts Article 18 of the country's constitution, which proclaims Belarus "a neutral country with a nuclear-free territory." Ulasevich said his lawsuit against Lukashenka contains detailed information about the damage Belarus suffered as a result of the Chornobyl nuclear disaster in neighboring Ukraine in 1986, as well as an assessment of the damage caused by the recent nuclear disaster in Japan.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

October 14, 2011

Activist Fined For Organizing OppositionGathering

Viktar Ivashkevich was fined 1.4 million rubles ($250) for organizing an opposition gathering in Minsk over the weekend.

Ivashkevich said the People's Assembly was held legally, in accordance with the law on holding town hall meetings, which does not require prior permission from local authorities. Judge Palulekh overruled the requests by Ivashkevich and his lawyer, Darya Lipkina.

The Minsk gathering was one of several "People's Assembly" meetings that were held across Belarus that day. At the meeting, the opposition activists and their supporters gathered in Peoples' Friendship Park, adopting a resolution addressed to the government.

The resolution demanded wage rises; an end to price hikes; the release of all political prisoners; and new, free presidential elections under the supervision of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

October 26, 2011
Banks Halt Belarus Deals over Repressions

Deutsche Bank and BNP Paribas have agreed not to conduct any further deals with the government of Belarus after they were publicly shamed over their business dealings with the authoritarian regime.

The German and French banks, two of Europe's largest financial institutions, were part of a syndicate alongside the Royal Bank of Scotland (RBS) and Russia's Sberbank which agreed to sell £1.2bn in Belarusian bonds in two separate deals in October last year and January.

In August The Independent reported that RBS had pulled out of future investments with the Belarusian government after senior executives were confronted by dissidents. Now Deutsche Bank and BNP Paribas have followed suit.

Source; Office for Democratic Belarus

November 4, 2011
Lukashenka: Governors to Command a Territorial Army

Belarus will create a new army of 120 thousand people with the focus on the territorial defense forces. This was stated by-Alyaksandr Lukashenka on November 4, presenting the generals ranks to the heads of the six oblasts and the capital Minsk. "Our governors are military men. You'll have to devote part of your lives to military service from now on. You will carry out exercises on territorial defense, and you should finalize all legal and regulatory framework together with thegeneral staff," said Alexander Lukashenka.

He said that the troops of territorial defense would clearly interact with the main army, adding that business enterprises could provide personnel to the army.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

November 18, 2011
Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan Agree On Economic Union

Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan have agreed to create a body regulating their trade and economies that could eventually become a Eurasian economic union.

The presidents of the three former Soviet republics — which already have a customs union — signed a declaration in the Kremlin targeting a full "Eurasian economic union" by 2015.

Russia's Dmitry Medvedev, Belarus's Alyaksandr Lukashenka, and Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan also signed an accord on the creation of a super-national executive body to oversee tighter economic integration.

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin recently evoked the idea of an EU-style Eurasian economic union to bring former Soviet republics closer. Medvedev said any former Soviet republic would be welcome to join.

The Eurasian Economic Commission will be headed by-Russian Industry Minister Viktor Khristenko, and the Eurasian Economic Union will be headquartered in Moscow.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

November 25, 2011
Russia slashes gas prices

Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin says Moscow is slashing the price Minsk has to pay for gas to less than half the average paid by other European states. Speaking ahead of a meeting with visiting Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Putin said in televised remarks that the price cut was "a substantial rebate. It will help to keep at least $2 billion in Belarus."

Putin said the price Belarus pays for Russian gas would drop from the $244 per thousand cubic meters this year to $164 at the start of 2012. Under the plan, Minsk would start paying Russia's own domestic price by 2014.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

November 25, 2011
Beltransgaz sold to Russia

Gazprom and the Belarusian State Property Committee have signed the agreement about the sale of Beltransgaz today.

Thus, Russia owns 100% of the shares of the Belarusian gas transport company. "Gazprom" has paid $2.5bn for the second half of the shares. According to the agreement, the minimum extra charge for the gas "Beltarnsgaz" will sell to Belarusian consumers will total 15.59 dollars for one thousand cubic metres. It will change according to the inflation rate in the future, according to BelaPAN.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

November 30, 2011
Belarus Has Highest Inflation in Europe

Belarus was leading European countries in the growth of-consumer prices, the Belarusian National Statistical Committee said in a report Tuesday.

The growth in consumer prices in Belarus amounted to 88.7 percent when comparing October 2011 to December 2010, the report said. Over the same period, however, the figure was 6.5 percent in Kazakhstan, 5.2 percent in Russian, 4.2 percent in of its value this year as a result of a balance-of-payments crisis. The central bank has raised its refinancing rate to 40 percent.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

November 30, 2011
Belarus National Debt Exceeded $14.1 Billion

November 1, 2011, the national debt of Belarus totaled-Br122 trillion, which is $14.18 billion at the rate of National Bank on December 1 (Br8.590 per dollar). Thus, the national debt increased 3.2-foldthis year. Only the October debt of Belarus increased by 45.3%, reported the National Statistic Committee.

As Telegraf previously reported, the Eurasian Economic Community is ready to transfer the$440 million tranche of stabilization loan to Belarus. Earlier, Belarus agreed with the EurAsEC anti-crisis fund on a program of economic reforms in exchange for a $3 billion loan to be provided in six installments over the 2011-2013 period. The first tranche of $800 million was received by Minsk in June 2011

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus.

December 3, 2011
Germany, UK urge Belarus to Commute Death Sentences in Bomb Case

The German and British government on Friday appealed to

Belarus to commute the death sentences passed on two men found guilty of carrying out a bomb attack in the Minsk subway earlier this year.

In Germany, the Belarus ambassador in Berlin was summoned to the Foreign Ministry to hear the German view, according to the dpa news agency. Chancellor Angela Merkel's spokesman, Steffen Seibert, said Germany is against the death penalty on principle, but also believes the circumstances of the trial meant that the sentences against the two men can not be justified.

British Foreign Office Minister David Lidington also expressed the United Kingdom's opposition to the death penalty

and questioned "the standard of evidence provided and the conduct of the trial." He also called on Belarus to commute the sentences and "to establish a formal moratorium with a view to abolition of the death penalty."

On Wednesday, Dzmitry Kanavalau and Uladzislau Kavalyou were both found guilty of detonating an explosive device a a subway station in Minsk on April 11, killing 15 people and injuring more than 200 others.

Belarus remains the only European country which imposes and carries out the death penalty. Last year, two people were sentenced to death and eventually executed.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

December 5, 2011

Clinton Tells OSCE that Ex-Soviet Republics Need Reforms

U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has pushed for greater democratic reforms and respect for human rights in former Soviet republics — criticizing Russia for a parliamentary election she says was rigged.

Speaking in Vilnius at the start of a two-day ministerial meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), Clinton said Russia needs to act on recommendations made by OSCE election monitors after Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's United Russia party won the most parliamentary seats in a poll on December 4:

"As we have seen in many places and most recently in theDuma elections in Russia, elections that are neither free nor fair [undermine the people's confidence]," she said Highlighting democratic shortcomings and rights abuses in other former Soviet republics, Clinton announced to the OSCE ministers from 56 countries that she will meet later on December 5 in Vilnius with Belarusian activists to discuss abuses in their country:

Clinton today called the attention to specific rights abuses in Belarus, including the continued detention of candidates who had opposed Lukashenka in the country's 2010 presidential election and to the jailing late last month of a prominent rights activist:

"In Belarus, less than 40 kilometers away from here, human rights defenders face unremitting persecution," she said. "People like Ales Byalyatski, sentenced to four and half years in prison for tax evasion, but whose real crime in the eyes of the state was helping victims of state repression. Former presidential candidates from the democratic opposition, Andrey Sannikau and Mikalay Statkevich, [are] still in prison a year after the government crackdown along with other political prisoners."

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

December 8, 2011

Commissioner Sets out Vision of Belarus Transformation

In Belarus, the people should determine their future and not the authorities, EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle has said addressing the Carnegie Europe event in Brussels "Transforming Belarus — Ways Ahead."

Setting out his positive vision of Belarus, "based not on empty words, but on concrete EU support and assistance," the Commissioner underlined that the EU's 'multi-dimensional' approach to Belarus had two strands, namely "a tough line towards the current repressive regime" complemented by the policy of engagement "with all those in Belarus who support reform and modernisation."

Turning to the funding opportunities for Belarusian civil society and independent media, the Commissioner said the EU had earmarked €19.3 million for 2011-2013, available under a range of programmes and instruments, namely the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights, the newly-created Neighbourhood Civil Society Facility, and soon the new European Endowment for Democracy.

Source: Office for Democratic Belarus

December 10, 2011

Gazprom to Triple (or Double?) Beltransgaz Salaries

The Russian Gazprom,which recently became the sole owner of Beltransgaz, promises to raise **three-fold** the salaries of the employees of the Belarusian company. This was reported by Gazprom representative Sergei Kupriyanov.

On December 8,the Gazprom head Alexei Miller came to Minsk to get acquainted with Beltransgaz staff. As previously reported, the Russiangas monopoly signed an agreement with the State Property Committee of Belarus to purchase the remaining Beltransgaz stake for $2.5 billion. At the December 3 meeting with Gazprom head Alexei Miller, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin proposed to Miller to double the salary for Beltransgaz employees.

Source: Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

December 13, 2011

Representatives of Belarusian opposition in London.

On 13 December the Belarusian delegation, which included the Head of the United Civil Party Anatoli Lyabedzka, Iryna Bahdanava (campaign "European Belarus"), Ihar Draka ("Tell the truth!"), Vitali Rymasheuski and Ales Mikhalevich (ex-candidates for presidency) together with Aleksei Yanukevich (leader of BPF party), was received at the House of Commons. They discussed the issues of political repressions and their effect on the advent of changes in Belarus.

Source: Belarus Digest

Culture & Society

Support within EU Exists for Russia's "Sphere of Interest"

Belarusian studies in the West have always remained in the shadow of Russian, Polish or Ukrainian studies. That is why the number of Belarus-related books and articles lags far behind those on the neighbouring countries. Non-surprisingly, many western scholars and analysts have somewhat stereotypical view on Belarus' past and often consider the present Belarusian state as being within the Russian sphere of interest. We asked a prominent Canadian historian David R. Marples, the author of *Belarus: a Denationalized Nation*, to make a historical overview and analyse the contemporary situation with the Belarusian studies in the North America as well as to express his opinion on the role that Belarusian language should play in the Belarus-related studies.

Belarusian Review (BR): It is largely believed that among the Western scholars of humanities Belarus gets the least attention compared with Russia, Ukraine or the Baltics. How could you evaluate the current state of the

Belarusian studies in the West and what are the reasons for the current state of affairs?

David Marples (DM): It certainly gets less attention than Russia or Ukraine. For many years the Slavic field was dominated by Russian studies. Since the 1980s, Ukrainian studies has come to the fore, partly because of research institutes founded by the local Diaspora, and partly because of states' recognition of the need to study a large central European nation of 45 million people. Belarus, lacking a Diaspora, a history of being an independent state for more than a few weeks, and much smaller in size does not attract the same attention. It also has no vital trading links with the West other than as a conduit for Russian oil and gas. All these factors make it more difficult to make a case for establishing centers for Belarusian studies. The one exception is the Center for Belarusian Studies in Winfield, Kansas, which was a big step forward. Unfortunately we have no equivalent in Canada.

BR: Many scholars and analysts stereotypically include Belarus in the so-called "Russosphere". Does it contribute to the comprehensive analysis of the Belarusian past and present and maintenance of the effective policies toward the country?

DM: It's not very helpful but it is an attitude exacerbated by both current leaderships in Russia, especially, but also in Belarus through the largely moribund Russia-Belarus Union and the regime's deliberate fostering of the cult of the Great Patriotic War to the exclusion of all other historical events. If Belarus and Belarusian studies is to have a future it is with focus on an independent entity with close ties geographically and historically to Europe, as well as Russia. However, I believe the situation has improved dramatically over the past decade and, ironically, in part thanks to the Belarusian president and his antics. The Eastern Partnership, though largely symbolic, is also a useful stepping-stone to recognizing Belarus as an independent entity that need not confine itself to the Russian sphere. However, I believe there is significant support within the EU for regarding Belarus as part of the Russian "sphere of interest."

BR: In your opinion, do Western analysts use the information/research made by Belarusian (historians, sociologies, philosophers) or do they prefer to use Western sources? How do you evaluate the level of Belarusian research on Belarusian issues within the country?

DM: I can only speak for myself. I use Belarusian sources insofar as they are available. Publications like Arche, for example, are extremely difficult to access in western Canada. In fact the only journal of note I can read regularly is the government controlled Bielaruskaja Dumka. For historical topics, on the other hand, the situation is better as most monographs by Belarusian scholars find their way to our libraries within a year or less or else they can be ordered on line through various agencies. The level of Belarusian research on internal issues is obviously higher in Belarus than in the West, but independent research is limited to nongovernment outlets, like BISS or The Bell. Publications of BISS are in my view the excellent; they have some outstanding researchers (and that is in spite of the great loss recently of Vitali Silitski).

BR: Does a Western scholar or analyst dealing with Belarus need to know the Belarusian language (to possess at least relevant reading skills) or is the knowledge of Russian sufficient for comprehensive monitoring and analysis of the Belarusian situation?

DM: I would say reading skills are needed in Belarusian as well. There are for sure important outlets in Russian (also in English, it seems self-evident, but more and more sites are releasing English versions of their materials), but the researcher would miss a lot by omitting Belarusian media and analytical publications.

BR: There are at least three ways of transliterating the Belarusian personal and geographic names that may be observed in the current studies (Belarusian and Russian-language LOC systems and the Lacinka). Many authors still tend to "Russify" Belarusian names despite the fact that the usage of Lacinka for the Belarusian geographic names is a subject of legal regulation both domestically and internationally, and the personal names tend to be transliterated according to the LOC rules for the Belarusian language. How should this transliteration mess be solved and which system(s) is the most suitable for writing Belarusian names in such a way so that the distinctive character of the Belarusian language is emphasized?

DM: With respect, this is a leading question. And the logical answer to it may not be feasible for another generation or so when Lacinka is more familiar to the population. Frankly, I prefer Cyrillic in any case, in either Belarusian or Russian form. But I am a historian and can therefore have an excuse to offer such a Philistine point of view. Most of my generation was trained in Russian before we approached another Slavic language (and it was never easy back in the UK to find even an instructor in Ukrainian, let alone Belarusian), and this leads one to grope with Latin forms, which is why I struggle with Polish. The answer would be to learn Belarusian in Lacinka form from scratch but I am afraid I lack time and energy to do that!

Editor's Note:

The LACINKA transliteration is not meant to replace the Cyrillic alphabet of the original Belarusian text. It is intended for the Western reader, inasmuch it accurately conveys certain specifically Belarusian sounds.

Quotes of Quarter

Representative **CHRIS SMITH** stated during the final passage on December 20 of the Belarus Democracy and Human Rights Act of 2011:

"Through a series of rigged elections, large-scale intimidation, and the suppression of independent media and civil society, the dictator has long consolidated his control over virtually all national institutions. His dictatorship has the worst record for human rights by far of any government in Europe."

Post-WWII Soviet Policy On
Religious Minorities in Belarus

By Leonid Smilovitsky

Stating the Problem

After the end of the (Second World) war all religious confessions testified their loyalty to authorities. On one hand, it was a tribute to the victor; on the other — it was the necessity of continued legal existence. During transition to the peaceful construction process, the Soviet regime needed a democratic image and support by the entire population of the country. The believers hoped, that the state will treat its citizens, regardless of their religious beliefs, in a new way. However, the reality disappointed them.

The Bolsheviks considered religion a vestige of the past and an obstacle on the path of progress. The believers of all confessions suffered from policies of the Communist party. Persecutions and repressions did not spare the Orthodoxy, Catholicim, Islam and Judaism. At the end of 1930s most temples, monasteries, prayer houses and synagogues have been closed; observance of traditions was being persecuted.

Despite this, the religious life in Belarus has not faded. The war has significantly changed the portrait of the believers. The Christian churches and synagogues were now attended by a significantly larger number of older people, for whom observance of traditions remained a part of their life, helped to obtain relief from daily worries, to overcome losses faster, and to achieve inner balance. The inner migration produced a negative effect. People have been leaving their native localities, leaving smaller towns and cities for larger cities and regional centers. They have been also moving to other union republics, mainly to Russia and Ukraine; observing traditions in larger cities and industrial centers was difficult. The least numerous part of believers was comprised of children and young people, who have practically lost knowledge of the Yiddish language. The adults often avoided introducing their children to religion, in order not to hamper their integration in the Soviet society.

Creation of CARC

In May 1944, the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults (the CARC)[1] was established under the auspices of the Soviet Government (the Council of People's Commissars). While its main office was in Moscow, it had commissioners in each of the Republics of the USSR, the one in Minsk being assigned the task of regulating relations with all official religious minorities in Belorussia, including Judaism, the Roman Catholic Church, the Lutheran Church, the Armenian Apostolic Church, Islam, Buddhism, as well as various other religious sects. The Council for the Affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church had been established in 1943 to oversee the majority religion.[2] The regime repeatedly stated that all religious denominations in the Soviet Union should enjoy equal rights, without one dominating or persecuting another.[3]

The Council was responsible for drafting religious legislation, overseeing the execution of Government acts and decrees, registering congregations, prayer houses and their equipment, and, in theory, was meant to provide religious communities with ritual appurtenances and religious literature. In addition, the CARC was to act as a neutral arbitrator in cases of disputes between religious communities and local Soviet authorities, and had the right to demand information from regional Party committees and Soviet State organs of power relating to the various religions. All state and public institutions and departments had to get the Council's approval for any activity related to religious life. As the CARC's purpose was to exert greater control over the activities of minority religions, it did not introduce changes in state policy but functioned primarily as a bureaucratic institution.

Despite its clearly negative attitude to religion, the regime was still anxious to acquire maximum political support in the war years and those immediately following the war. As the economy also had to be rebuilt, the regime considered it politically expedient to avoid tension among the populace[4] and to moderate the anti-religious tendencies of the local authorities. The CARC now recommended that the local authorities refrain from imposing administrative sanctions on religious people and be guided entirely by prudent political considerations. The July 1945 conference of the CARC commissioners in Moscow criticized the attitude of certain administrative and party officials in some regions of the country, who regarded the establishment of the CARC as a temporary, war-related measure, who expected the body to be short-lived and who did not regard it as worthy of their serious involvement and cooperation. The lack of enthusiasm for cooperating with the CARC was either due to skepticism on the viability of religion, or the shortage of resources suffered by local authorities in the postwar years. The conference organizers made it clear that the mission of the CARC was a "long-term responsibility of high importance,"[5] and ordered local authorities not to obstruct the nationwide religious revival.

While it was one thing to make fine political declarations, there was in fact no will by officialdom to imple-

1. SDRK (Sovet po delam religioznykh kultov pri Sovete Ministrov BSSR) – Following the Russian (and the literature in English) the name of this body has been translated as the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults at the Council of Ministers of Belorussia (the CARC), though possible more correct might be the Council for the Affairs of Religious Creeds, since, however the Soviets might have viewed them, in English Christianity, Judaism and Islam are religions or creeds, but not cults.

2. *Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov i Velikaya Otechestvennaya voina*. Sbornik dokumentov [The Russian Orthodox Church and the Great Patriotic War. Collection of documents*]*, Moscow 1943, p. 5; Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: A Contemporary History*, Beckenham 1986, p. 6.

3. "Ob organizatsii Soveta po delam religioznykh kultov [The organization of the CARC. Decree of the Soviet Government]." Postanovlenie SNK SSSR # 572, May 19, 1944, Moscow, Kremlin. Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Rossiiskoy Federatsii (= GARF), F. 6991, Op. 4, D.1, pp. 2-6.

4. *Kanfessii na Belarusi kanets 18-20 st*. [Confessions in Belorussia, end of 18-20 cent.] U.I.Navitsky (ed.), Minsk 1998, pp. 234-235.

5 "The role and goals of the Council for the Affairs of Religious Cults at the Council of Ministers of the USSR." Informative report. Only for the CARC staff members, Moscow, June 1, 1945. Yad Vashem Archives (= YVA), M-46/3, p. 11.

ment them. The real attitude of the authorities towards the various religious denominations was quite different from the declared one. For the previous twenty years religious people had been branded as public enemies of the regime, so it was hardly surprising that the local authorities did not cooperate with them too warmly from 1941. This difference was particularly pronounced in Belorussia with its multi-national population and multi-faith religious structure. Almost all the faiths were represented in Belarus despite its relatively small size: the Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, Protestantism, Islam and Judaism. In surveying these different religious groups we will see in this chapter how the regime's professions of liberalization were to remain on the theoretical plane only.

The Russian Orthodox Church

The Stalin regime showed a certain tolerance towards the Russian Orthodox Church that had taken a patriotic stance in the war years, appealing regularly to its adherents to take an active part in defending their native land. Alexis I, Patriarch of Moscow and All Russia, frequently urged congregations to provide all possible assistance to the authorities in the face of the enemy. After the victory over Germany, the regime wanted to involve this large sector of the population in the reconstruction activities.

At the beginning of 1946, the head of the Belorussian Orthodox diocese was replaced. Metropolitan Vasili (Ratmirov) retired, being succeeded by Archbishop Pitirim, who had formerly served as Archbishop of Kursk and Belgorod, and who had been awarded a medal "For Heroic Labor in the Great Patriotic War, 1941-1945." As an acknowledgement of his wartime services, he was granted the right to wear a cross on his klobuk.[6] Pitirim officiated at the Minsk Cathedral, and served as head of the Russian Orthodox Church of BSSR .

The Orthodox Church was the largest of the religions in the Republic, whose adherents constituted perhaps 30% of the total population though, unfortunately, accurate statistical data are not available. The faithful was afraid of demonstrating their loyalty to the church openly, since this would signal a lack of loyalty to the regime. It was therefore left to the local and central authorities to report the number of congregations (registered and non-registered), churches, life-cycle data (births, marriages and funerals), and special church holiday events. Although the number of priests and clergymen is on record, the same is not true of the congregants. Since the regime for its part had embraced the doctrine that the Soviet people had voluntarily rejected religion, collection of data on this subject by local authorities was neither systematic nor conclusive. For example, in the only official census during the period under review (1959) there were no questions pertaining to religion. Indeed, overall statistics of religious adherents were never published before the collapse of the Soviet regime in 1991. Although occasionally there are rough estimates of the numbers of believers in certain towns or regions, there is a general lack of data regarding the Republic as a whole. This holds true for all religions both in Belarus and throughout the USSR.[7]

In most cases, the authorities did not make the registering of Orthodox parishes overly difficult. By 1945, 705 Orthodox churches had been registered; by 1947 the number had grown to 906 (an increase of 201 churches), and on January 1, 1948 when the CARC's registration campaign was completed, the records listed 1050 registered churches and prayer houses. Most of the churches in Eastern Belarus had been rebuilt after the war and the authorities allowed the training of priests to staff them. In case of a dispute between local authorities and religious groups, the parties tried to reach a compromise.[8]

In 1949 the Orthodox Church in Belarus was manned by 778 priests, 425 of whom were graduates of theological colleges and 72 of whom had advanced degrees in theology. Some provided services in more than one parish. Training courses for priests took place at the Zhirovichi monastery. Metropolitan Pitirim ordained 255 priests and appointed 113 psalm-readers in the years 1945–1953. There were two active convents, one in Polotsk and one in Grodno, besides the monastery in Zhirovichi. The Staro-Euphrasinyevsky convent in Polotsk had opened as far back as 1941, with the permission of the German occupation administration.[9]

In December 1949, the Russian Orthodox clergy took part in celebrations marking Stalin's 70th birthday. In their sermons, the church hierarchs praised the general policies of the Communist party and the Soviet government as "wise" and "farsighted". Prayer services eulogizing the "great leader of all the nations" were held in many churches, while hundreds of congratulatory telegrams reached Moscow.[10] At the same time, however, the regime tried gradually to diminish the influence of the Orthodox Church through confiscation of land and by the use of anti-religious propaganda. In 1946-1950, as part of the collectivization campaign in the Western provinces of Belarus the Church lost most of its estates. Virulent ideological attacks on the clergy frequently appeared in the press, in political propaganda, and in secret directives to the local party and soviet authorities. Yet, despite all this, all the prerequisites and conditions enabling normal religious practice to take place were available to Russian Orthodox believers.[11]

After the war, communities of "Old Believers"[12] – a

6. *Klobuk* – a clerical headdress in cylinder form – L.S.
7. M.V. Shkarovsky, *Natstistskaya Germania i Pravoslavnaya tserkov* [Nazi Germany and the Russian Orthodox Church], Moscow 2002, p. 507.
8. Afanasii Martos, *Belarus v istoricheskoy, gosudarstvennoy i tserkovnoy zhizni* [Belorussia in Historical, State and Religious life], Minsk 2000, pp. 339-341; S.P. Ramet (ed.), *Religious Policy in the Soviet Union*, Cambridge 1993, p. 14.
9. Informative letter from the CARC in Minsk, February 15, 1946, Natsionalny Arkhiv Respubliki Belarus (=NARB), F. 4, Op. 62, D. 392, 1, 40.
10. M.V. Shkarovsky, *Russkaya pravoslavnaya tserkov pri Staline i Khrushcheve*, Moscow 2000, pp. 332-333.
11. *Kanfesii na Belarusi* …, Minsk 1998, pp. 238-240, 250-253; John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and the Successor States*, Cambridge 1994, p. 18.
12. Old Believers or *raskolnik*i, the adherents of "the Old Faith," refused to accept Russian Orthodox Church reforms implemented by Patriarch Nikon in the 17th century. Old Believers had originally arrived in Belorussia from Central Russia and Pomorye and established their own settlement in Vetka, in the Mogilev Province (*Gubernia*) in 1685.

break-away sect called Raskolniki that was an important subgroup of the Russian Orthodox Church – also tried to expand their activities. The Raskolniki were strongly opposed to the official Russian Orthodox Church in Belorussia, and never cooperated with it. They suffered greatly under the Soviet regime, much more than the official Orthodox Church, that tended to compromise with the local and central authorities. During World War II, the Raskolniki had received permission from the German administration to renovate their churches and elect spiritual leaders. Statistics from 1946 list 71 communities of Old Believers in Belarus: 16 in the Vitebsk Oblast (region), 20 in the Polotsk Oblast, 7 in the Molodechno Oblast and 8 in the Minsk Oblast). In the Braslav, Miory and Bobruisk rayons (districts), there were over 50 communities that functioned without a priest, in the manner historically adopted by Old Believers in the northern territories of Russia. Altogether, the number of Old Believers belonging to various congregations in Belarustotaled some 12,000.[13]

The Roman Catholic Church

In contrast to the relatively stable status of the Russian Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church went into a new and major confrontation with the Soviet regime. According to available statistics, Catholics comprised 20% of the Belarusian population in the years 1945-1947.

In 1939, after Stalin's annexation of the Western provinces of Belorussia, there were 416 Catholic churches and 501 priests in the entire Republic, the majority in these newly annexed regions; by January 1946, these numbers had fallen to 387 and 225 respectively. As World War II progressed, the number of Catholic monasteries and convents constantly declined. In 1939, in Western Belarus there were 65 Catholic monasteries and convents. By the end of 1945, only two monasteries remained, one in Grodno and the other in Kobrin: and five convents – in the districts of Grodno, Druya, Nesvizh and Antopol. When the Nesvizh monastery relocated to Poland in the fall of 1945, its building and equipment were given over to a teachers' college. The last of the monasteries, in Grodno, was shut down in 1950, when its building was redesigned to accommodate a hospital.[14]

The Catholic clergy was accused of anti-state activities, ideological sabotage, opposing the compulsory loans to the State, disrupting agricultural supplies, opposing collectivization, boycotting elections, Polishization (polonizatsia) of Belarusians and the like. These accusations were not implausible. Despite its professed indifference to politics, the Catholic Church had never accepted the 1939 annexation of the Western provinces of the Ukraine and Belarus by the Soviet regime.[15] The Catholic Church also opposed the state policies of abolition of private property and compulsory state loans. Throughout the war, the Catholics provided assistance to the Armia Krajowa (the Polish Home Army), an underground militant formation of the Polish government in exile in London.

By the middle of 1946, all 84 Catholic churches in Eastern Belarus had been proscribed as "strongholds of the Vatican" and shut down, and 107 priests had lost their parishes. The buildings of the Catholic churches in Minsk, Zaslavl' and Cherven' were turned into warehouses, while those in Uzda and Logoisk became movie theaters. The church building in Berezino became a library. In the Western regions, many churches functioned without priests (28 in Baranovichi, 10 in Grodno, 6 in Pinsk and 6 in Brest). In 1948, the authorities forbade priests from providing services in more than one parish, thus leaving ninety-eight congregations bereft of a spiritual leader. At the same time, the absence of a parish priest served as the main pretext for rejecting applications to register new congregations.

In BSSR, there was not one single Catholic educational institution, at a time when priests from abroad were forbidden from entering the Republic. In 1949, the authorities refused applications for residency permits from fourteen Catholic priests from Lithuania in Belarus, who wanted to set up and administer parishes in the Grodno and Polotsk regions. During the period from 1946 to 1950, the total number of Catholic priests dropped by more than fifty percent, from 225 to 111.[16] As a result, there was often no priest available to take confession, administer communion, marry young couples, baptize the newly born or conduct burial services for the dead.[17]

In accordance with Soviet policy regarding clergy of all faiths, priests were forbidden to engage in religious education of children or instruct them in the Bible or the catechism. The regime forced priests to give written undertakings that they would respect this prohibition, which meant they would face criminal proceedings if it were violated. The prohibition was regarded as part of the fight against the propagation of Polish nationalism and anti-Soviet views among the younger generation.

From 1945 the local and state authorities launched a campaign to impose agreements that combined official registration of religious congregations with the handing over to the regime of the place of worship of the congregation in question. While this was a standard procedure that was imposed on all faiths, it represented a particularly telling loss of ownership and control over church property for the Roman Catholic Church. If a community refused to sign the standard agreement, it was forbidden from holding public religious services. Most priests claimed that Catholic churches within the territory of the USSR belonged to the Pope and not to the State, and refused to cooperate with the authorities. Nevertheless, under the pressure of threats and cajoled by promises, by

13. O. Pospielovsky, *The Russian Church under the Soviet Regime, 1917-1982*, New York 1984, p. 12; Informative letter of the CARC, BSSR, March 15, 1947, NARB, F. 952, Op. 2, D.2, p. 290; F. 4, Op. 29, D. 146, p. 104.
14. Report of Commissioner Ulasevich to Poliansky, Chairman of the CARC in Moscow," August 12, 1948: NARB, F. 952, Op. 2, D. 4, pp. 9-10.
15. E.S. Yarmusik, *Katolicheski kostel v Belorussii v gody vtoroy mirovoy voiny (1939-1945).* The Catholic Church in Belorussia during WWII], Grodno 2002, p. 30.
16. "Report of K. Ulasevich, the CARC Commissioner in Minsk, November 19, 1947": NARB, F. 4, Op. 62, D.392, pp. 363-365.
17. "Represii protiv duhavenstva rymska-katalschkay tsarkvy u BSSR" [Repression of Priests in the BSSR], *Palitychniya reprecii na Belarusi, Proceedings of Conference*, Minsk 1998, pp. 97-105; Directive letter of the CARC in Minsk, July 1, 1947, NARB, F. 4, Op. 62, D.162, pp. 51-54.

1949, 234 out of 272 parishes had been forced to accept the mandated registration terms.[18]

By 1953, public prayers were being held in the only 154 Catholic churches remaining after all the others had been shut down and converted to other purposes: 75 had become warehouses, 28 were now cultural or educational institutions, 18 were made suitable to serve as Russian Orthodox churches, and another 43 simply abandoned. Yet despite all of the regime's efforts to undermine the Catholic Church, its influence remained significant. In Western Belarus, large parts of the population sympathized with the Catholic Church, some on account of their religious beliefs, and others to mark their opposition to the state policy of suppressing dissent. Communist Party and MGB (Ministry of State Security) records reported that the actual number of confessions, church weddings, christenings and masses performed annually by Catholic priests amounted to hundreds if not thousands in 1952-1953, indicating an increase in activity since the end of the war.[19]

---

18. "Ulasevich-Poliansky," [Letter from Ulasevich to Poliansky] August 12, 1948: NARB, F. 952, Op. 2, D.$, pp. 10-12

19. "Report of Ulasevich to Poliansky, November 8, 1953: Ibid, F.4, Op. 62, D. 348, pp. 180-182

*Continued in the Spring 2012 issue of **Belarusian Review***

Leonid Smilovitsky (1955), born in Belarus, Ph.D. (1984), researcher at The Byelorussian State Museum of the History of the Great Patriotic War (1979-1980), associated Professor at The Belarus State University of Culture (1981-1992), Yad Vashem in Jerusalem (1994-1995), and now in Diaspora Research Center of Tel Aviv University (1995 - till now).

Author of the three monographs: *Jews in Belarus. From Our Common History, 1905-1953*, Minsk 1999, and *Holocaust in Belorussia, 1941-1944*, Tel-Aviv 2000, *Jews in Turov. History of Shtetl in Mozyr Polesye Region*, Jerusalem 2008, and more than one hundred publications in the field of history of Belarus and Belarus Jewry.

Most important papers could be achieved at:

http://www.jewishgen.org/Belarus/newsletter/authors.htm

http://souz.co.il/clubs/read.html?article=2/22&Club ID=1

http://www.tau.ac.il/humanities/ggcenter

Quotes of Quarter

A letter by **Iryna Khalip** to **SVETLANA MEDVEDEVA and LYUDMILA PUTINA** has been published in "Novaya Gazeta" on December 23:

> "I am writing to you as the wife of Belarusian political prisoner Andrei Sannikau, presidential candidate in the 2010 election and as the mother of four-year-old Danila Sannikau ... The situation is critical today. The Belarusian special services are doing their best to make me a widow and my son an orphan … I have no doubt that you can find the right words to persuade your husbands to obtain the release of my husband and all those thrown into Belarusian prison only for their beliefs."

Andrei Sannikau's wife also wrote to the wives of presidents of France, the United States, Poland and to the wife of the British Prime Minister.

BELARUS ABROAD

Official Recognition of National Minorities in Czech Republic

Mutual relations between Belarusian and Czech peoples have a long history. One of most remarkable events in Belarus' history is connected with Prague, where in 1517 the Belarusian humanist, Dr. Francišak Skaryna published the first Belarusian printed book — the Bible. Today all Belarusians are familiar with this fact.

Later, in the 20th century, democratic Czechoslovakia was among first European countries to recognize Belarus' independence, and offered refuge to the Belarusian government-in-exile.

Despite these historically close ties the Belarusian community in the Czech Republic currently does not enjoy the status of an officially recognized National Minority.

After the downfall of the Communist regime in 1989, the Czech lands were transformed into a democratic state, in which protection of national minorities is secured not only by democratic order, but also by certain international obligations.

One of these is the **European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages,** ratified by the Czech Republic on November 15, 2006. Its implementation on the republic's territory became legally binding on March 1, 2007. According to the Article 15 of the Charter, each party of the contract (in this case, the Czech Republic) is obliged to honor commitments, specified by the Charter.

In practice, the responsibility for the implementation of these commitments has been assigned to the **Govern-**

ment's Council for National Minorities (Rada Vlády pro Národnostní Menšiny.)

At the present, its membership consists of:

a) 12 officially recognized national minorities:

Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Greek, Hungarian, Polish, Roma, Russian, Ruthenian, Serbian, Slovak, Ukrainian.

b) representatives of ministries of: culture, education, labor and social affairs, foreign affairs.

One of the most significant projects within the Charter's framework is the support of minorities' activities designed to preserve their cultures and languages by means of courses, schools and publications. The government of the Czech Republic commits itself to provide certain financial subsidies for this support, derived fom the state's budget.

Members of the local Belarusian community have long ago observed that 11 out of 12 official minorities represent ethnic groups that settled in Czech lands during the pre-World War II period and cannot be considered indigenous to any particular region. The relatively numerous Polish minority, compactly inhabiting a part of the Moravian-Silesian region (*kraj* in Czech), is an exception...

The history of the Belarusian diaspora is essentially similar ; in the 1920s there existed (mainly in Prague) a numerous and quite active Belarusian student community. However, after the Communist coup d'etat in 1948, its activity practically ceased. Moreover, key members of the local Belarusian community were forcibly deported to the Soviet Union, despite having acquired Czechoslovak citizenship...

This is why after the Czech Velvet Revolution of 1989 the prospects of the Belarusian ethnic group becoming officially recognized as a national minority appeared rather slim — simply, because its present activities did not seem to link to its pre-WorldWar II beginnings.

In 2011 a group of young local Belarusian activists, members of the **Pahonia** civic association, consisting primarily of students and businessmen , has decided to tackle the recognition issue from a different angle. The group has decided to analyze the Czech laws concerning the requirements for the official recognition of a national minority, in order to determine the Belarusian community's realistic chances and to map out accordingly a new strategy of action.

This legal analysis was prepared by Kiryl Kaścian, a jurist and web-editor of the *Belarusian Review* publication. The analysis has also recognized the necessity of adding an opinion by an expert historian, that would provide an evaluation of the Belarusians' historical presence in today's Czech lands. Hanna Vasilevich, assistant editor of the *Belarusian Review*, was instrumental in finding such an expert - in person of Prof. Milada Polišenská.

Prof. Polišenská's historical research has concentrated on Communist repressions in the postWorldWar II Czechoslovakia , as well as on the issues of nation-building and nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe.

Cooperation of Mr. Kaścian, Miss Vasilevich and Prof. Polišenská helped the group to consolidate and produce the necessary legal documents The basic document was the **Memorandum**, prepared by Mr. Kascian. It, along with Prof. Polišenská's expert opinion, has been forwarded to President Václav Klaus , Prime Minister Petr Nečas, and the chairs of both chambers of the Czech Republic's parliament: Přemyslav Sobotka(Senate), and Miroslava Němcová (Lower House). All their replies were generally favorable, although referring the matter to the proper institution: the Council for National Minorities.



***Stary Olsa** concert in Prague on December 4, 2011: Organizers with members of the band*

The Council is making the final decision of the official recognition process conditional on the results of the 2011 Census. These results will be published in March of 2012. Until that date, then, the process remains incomplete....

Nevertheless, as a result of the group's eforts, the Council for National Minorities has been regularly inviting representatives of the Belarusian community to its meetings, as guests.

In December 2011, the initiative group, consisting of **Pahonia's** members and the editorial staff of *Belarusian Review* has invited all members of the Council of National Minorities to a concert of the well-known Belarusian medieval music band **Stary Olsa**, — to familiarize them with Belarusian culture.

Michalevic Tour in Canada

By Jean François Tessier

Ales Michalevic, ex-candidate for the Belarusian presidential elections of December 2010, has been awarded Canada's John Humphrey Prize, an award recognizing exceptional service to the defense of democracy and human rights. The award ceremony was held at the National Art Gallery in Ottawa on Tuesday, November 22nd. In the presence of President Ivonka J. Survilla of the Belarusian Democratic Republic, a gathering of Canadian parliamentarians, diplomats and activists assembled to applaud Mr. Michalevic and to show heartfelt support for the Belarusian cause.

The award ceremony was only the first step in a two-weeks long pan-Canadian tour for Mr. Michalevic. There were stops in Montréal, in French-speaking Québec and then across Western Canada, in Toronto, Vancouver and Calgary before returning to Ottawa.

On that last stop, Mr Michalevic and President Survilla attended an informal dinner organized by members of the

Canadian official opposition, during which a closer contact with parliamentarians could be established. President Survilla spoke eloquently of the beauty of Belarus and the wonders of its culture. Switching easily between French, Belarusian and English, the President kept the whole assembly mesmerized. President Survilla, at 75 years of age, gave an overview of the extent of the damage inflicted on Belarusian society by Lukashenka's dictatorship.

President Survilla also mentioned that a Western-financed economic rescue plan, a Marshall Plan of a sort, for Belarus needs to be agreed upon to help smooth the transition to a full-fledged market economy once the regime collapses.

On a closing note, Survilla reminded the Parliamentarians of what they could do to help.

"Speak of us in the Commons (the Canadian parliament), remind the world that we are there. Every new friend that Belarus gains, people who will simply speak about the beauty of its culture and the friendliness of its people helps to collapse the dictatorship.»

Source: J.F. Tessier is a Canadian Diplomatic Reporter

The First International Congress Of Belarusian Studies in Kaunas

On September 23-25, 2011 Lithuanian Kaunas hosted about 200 participants from 14 countries who gathered to take part in the First International Congress of Belarusian Studies.

The Congress was organised by the Institute of Political Studies "Political Sphere" (Minsk), Institute of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania (Kaunas) and the Vitaŭt the Great University (Kaunas) and was devoted to the 20th anniversary of the independence of Belarus. The Congress was supported by a wide range of Belarusian and foreign institutions and initatives such as for example the Belarusian Institute for Strategic Studies, the European Centre for Minority Issues (Flensburg, Germany) and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation. *Belarusian Review* was among the information partners of this event.

The Congress thematics offered a wide range of topics related to history, political and social studies, and provided a platform for Belarusian and foreign experts from different areas of expertise. The major work of the Congress took place during the thematic panels where scientific issues were discussed. However, due to time limits, the participants were not able to join different panels. At the same time, public discussions brought intensified debates of different actual topics of social and political life in Belarus within a wider regional and European context.

The general impression of the Congress seems to prove its success since it induced communication and intensified cooperation among its participants on an international scale. The Congress is to become an annual event. Thus, the Second International Congress of Belarusian Studies is expected to take place in September 2012 in Kaunas. The organizers are also to publish the First Congress materials as a separate multilingual volume.

Award for the *Belarusian Review* editorial

Editorial "Assisting a Little-known Nation," published in the Fall 2011 issue of *Belarusian Review*, written by **Kiryl Kascian**, has been awarded third place in citizen journalists' category in contest "Belarus in Focus" — organized by "Solidarity with Belarus Information Office," in cooperation with "Press Club Polska."

THOUGHTS & OBSERVATIONS

New Territorial Army, Deeper Integration with Russia

By David Marples

November 2011 witnessed interesting developments in Belarus: the announcement of the formation of a territorial army by President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and a new advisory body called the Council for the Development of an Informational Society (CDIS), run by an existing Operative-Analytical Center and headed by the president with his son Viktar as deputy. More recently, Russia sharply cut gas prices for Belarus for the first quarter of 2012, and in December the Council of the Anti-Crisis Fund of the Eurasian Economic Community agreed to release the second tranche of a $3 billion loan, worth $400 million. These events illustrate domestic fears of foreign threats as well as Russia's growing control over the Belarusian economy. In different ways they are both signs of Lukashenka's weakening position as Belarusian leader.

The formation of the Territorial Army was announced on November 4 during Lukashenka's visit to Hrodna, though there were also earlier discussions in the official media. The army is to be comprised of 120,000 troops as an auxiliary force for the regular army, with which it will communicate. Such a force, the president stated, is the most effective defense in the face of external aggression and at lower cost than the maintenance of a professional army. Heads of oblast governments at the same time received the military rank of Major-General. Lukashenka stressed the Ministry of Internal Affairs should use its powers to stop "extremist activities," while the KGB should expend less time on analytical work and become more actively involved in defending the state (Zvyazda, November 5).

Lukashenka hopes that the military hierarchy will... impose tighter control over high officials

Several analyses of this measure have been offered. Alyaksandr Alesin maintains that the goal is to distract people from economic problems, particularly the most active sector of the population aged between 35 and 50. He also considers that the military hierarchy will supplement the state's bureaucratic leadership to impose tighter control over high officials. The new "generals" by their nature will be obliged to follow orders from above (www.belmarket.by, November 8-13). Svyatlana Kalinkina considers that with this measure the president has shown that he has lost the ability to gauge the mood of the people. The formation of the army is a "clumsy attempt" to unite the nation before some imaginary military threat, but to frighten people with a war is the worst response to the current dilemmas (Belorusskiy Partizan, November 6). Valer Karbalevich is also critical, saying

that the move is based on irrational fears and constitutes a direct response to the brutal death of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya, though it might make sense to "mobilize" top-level officials in order to prevent their turning against the leadership (*Svaboda*, November 10).

On November 8, with Decree 515, Lukashenka created a new advisory body called the CDIS, comprised mainly of people with a military background. The intention is to control the Internet using as the leading organ the Operative-Analytical Center that was formerly subordinate to the Ministry of Communications. The list of undesirable websites has now been expanded to include 35 sites, access to which is banned from public Internet offices (www.belmarket.by, November 14-20). Once again the decree seems to have a military component, signaling that as far as the president is concerned, this is the best means of stamping out subversion, but it also indicates anxiety about the growing influence of the Internet in Belarus since the December 2010 elections.

Russia is prepared to make some compromises.. for more political control over its neighbor

While the president tries to increase his authority at home, the country drifts further into the Russian orbit. At a meeting of the Russian Cabinet in Moscow, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin announced that in the first quarter of 2012 Belarus would be allowed to pay a heavily subsidized price for Russian gas of $164 per thousand cubic meters. He also stated that the presidents of Russia and Belarus expect to ratify an agreement to provide a $10 billion loan to Belarus to build the controversial nuclear power station in the Hrodna region. Gazprom is also planning to buy the remaining 50 percent stake in Beltranshaz, which transports some 20 percent of Russian gas exports to European customers (Belapan, November 25).

On November 28, the Council of the Anti-Crisis Fund of the Eurasian Economic Community, which is controlled largely by Russia, accepted a decree to release a second tranche of a $3 billion loan to Belarus worth $400 million on condition that Belarus carries out economic reforms. An initial tranche of $800 million was released last June, and six more tranches are expected to be released by 2013 (*Narodnaya Volya*, November 28). Such funds are increasingly necessary as Belarus must pay the IMF $500,000 in 2012 and over $1.7 billion in 2013 for the loan of 2008-2010 (*Belorusskiy Partizan*, November 15).

In an interview with the news agency Belapan, Rustam Tankayev, described as a "leading expert at the Union of Oil and Gas Producers of Russia," declared that the gas discount and purchase of Belatranshaz constituted a geopolitical move on the part of Russia aimed at deeper integration and the formation of the Common Economic Zone. Russia is thus prepared to make some compromises in order to acquire more political control over its neighbor. Economist Syarhey Chaly judges that the ultimate goal is to tempt to Ukraine into joining the zone (www.naviny.by, November 26).

These developments illustrate the enfeeblement of the Belarusian regime. Its president is clearly fearful of foreign intervention, no matter how unrealistic that may seem to most outsiders. But his measures – the militarization of society and internal repressions – are more likely to alienate the once compliant populace. And despite occasional resistance, such as rejection of privatization of the food industry, "We have not and will not have careless privatization," (*Zvyazda*, November 16) Lukashenka is unable to withstand Russian economic encroachment since the state-run economy is too weak to survive without Russia's financial support.

Source: Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume: 8 Issue: 227, December 14, 2011

No Money – No Dictator?

Experts Predict the "Last Battle" Of "The Last Dictator in Europe"

By Solvita Denisa Liepniece

This slogan wasn't mentioned at the presentation of results for the "Democratic Change in Belarus: A Framework for Action" project, but it is the leading idea articulated by think tank experts in the recent publication. Damon Wilson (Executive Vice President of the Atlantic Council), Anders Aslund (Senior Fellow at the Peterson Institute), Peter Doran (Center for European Policy Analysis), David J. Kramer (Executive Director of Freedom House) and other experts formed a working group united by the thought that at the moment Lukashenka is as weak as he has ever been. They believe that the Western world can`t miss the chance to help him be gone away from the stage.

Isolation, sanctions, pressure and a complete end to dialogue with the government and other officials – only these unpopular solutions can help Belarus to escape the regime of Lukashenka. By giving this advice to the Western world, it is clear that experts see many signs that this is the right moment for a change in the situation. Now is the time to act and to act without mistakes. As A.Aslund mentioned, the Western world's biggest mistake has been providing financial aid to the regime of Lukashenka. Now the President of Belarus is looking for money to survive, and some partners like China are ready to give him a helping hand.

Post Lukashenka era

More than just shaping the regime should be a point for discussion in the Western World. Experts call for thinking about the post-Lukashenka era and providing scenarios for a near future without Lukashenka. It is a call to review the transition in the region as a whole and to "fix" some mistakes that were made in Ukraine. NGO and regional advisers must be prepared with their strategies.

Recommendations

There are two main sections in the policy recommendation chapter. The first is related to catalyzing positive democratic change in the economic and political spheres. The second is about preparing for a post-Lukashenka Belarus.

Under Lukashenka: Economy

It is significant that the first item on this to-do-list is privatization. Experts believe that, in a further attempt to survive, Lukashenka will sell state-owned companies. At the same time, selling the country's valuable economic assets is dangerous for a post-Lukashenka, independent Belarus. Similarities can be found with the Kuchma regime's privatization of Kryvorizhstal. The next items are to introduce sanctions and to not provide direct or indirect support to the regime.

Under Lukashenka: Politics

The first item of the political sphere of the to-do-list is about political prisoners, i.e. a huge proportion of the tiny-opposition, which is still in jail. Experts suggest supporting not only prisoners, but also their families. Money flowing to the opposition must be targeted and controlled. Support must be provided not only to parties, but also to NGOs and media. And there is a need to "look for opportunities to share best practices and effective techniques."

After Lukashenka: Economy

Experts recommend not only having plans for transition complete and ready for implementation, but also adding lessons learned from the transition in Central and Eastern Europe. They predict problems with foreign trade and macroeconomic imbalances, and warn about hyperinflation. Creating opportunities for entrepreneurs (both domestic and foreign) is also mentioned in this list.

After Lukashenka: Policy

The focus is on sustained democratization: elimination of state security measures and support to independent media and civic society. One of the goals is to prevent backsliding to the non-democratic regime. At the same time, "Western policymakers, particularly in the US, should frame the outcome of a transition in Belarus in terms of values and long-term strategic interests."[1] It is important for Western leaders to select and mentor tomorrow`s leaders "among today`s opposition."

The Author`s Analysis

In my opinion, the body of these guidelines may serve as a cosy "item" for Belarusian officials to grasp and to *justify* "The Discourse of the Enemy". This discourse has been constructed by Lukashenka since 1994 and some significant points have not been mentioned by the West. For nearly two decades, Aliaksandr Lukashenka has used political communication to create mental schemes and pave "metaphorical" fields. From a political communication perspective, one cannot ignore the fact that these metaphorical fields are the regime's outpost. While influencing society through appeals to the emotions, specific schemes and discourses are being formed that will later become a part of the political culture of modern Belarus.

Some scholars of political communication suggest that a change of democratic regimes is also characterised by a change in political rhetoric. This, among other things, includes a change in the nature and frequency of the use of metaphors. However, Lukashenka's metaphors are not typical of an authoritarian regime. In his metaphors, he does not strengthen the power (as Anderson points out) [2], but replaces the power with "the people" and "the people's" decisions. It should also be noted that some metaphors from Soviet vocabulary are actively being used by Lukashenka in "the original form" or partially modified.

While comparing *"Democratic Change in Belarus: A Framework for Action"* with the evolution of Aliaksandr Lukashenka's political rhetoric, it is possible to state that this text, as the basic rhetoric of Western political elites, is trapped by Lukashenka's rhetoric. His anti-rhetoric defence system is built on very clear associations. Because of a lack of attention to differences in political cultures, or rather negligence of the local specifics (Lukashenka uses different discourses and metaphors in his interviews with foreign media, external discourse differs), the imported Western discourses "are discredited on the way".

Considering the specifics of political communication in an authoritarian regime, these discourses circulate not only in the media and education, but also in the public sphere (through the introduction of ideology), which enhances their effectiveness.

Enemy at the gate and in "hinterland"

"I want to assure you: we defended our country in 1945 and we shall defend it now!"[3]

Here are some of the constructs.

The main goal of the opposition, as presented by Lukashenka, is the destruction of the state and its subordination to those who pay for opposition activities. Financial support for the opposition from the outside is highlighted by Lukashenka as the main factor that proves a lack of independence in the opposition's actions:

• Enemies of ordinary people (through calls for sanctions),

• Financially and intellectually dependent on sponsors,

• Members of the opposition are not paupers at all (opposition as profession and business),

• Stewards of Western policies aimed at plundering state property (privatisation).

The discourse of violence and aggression, which is attributed to the opposition, reaches its apogee at the point of the Great Patriotic War discourse . However, other stable offsets can be observed:

• Belarus in "the axis of evil", readiness for an armed conflict;

• Destabilisation in the country and the region;

• Belarus as the next target of violent "democratisation" after Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afganistan, Libya;

• Belarus as opponent and victim of a unipolar world.

Conclusion

The transition on political communication is an important issue in developing political communication. It is appropriate to apply lessons learned about the transition in Central and Eastern Europe, but it is equally important to study Lukashenka`s rhetoric as well. It is important for understanding how it will be possible to take off the black magic of this "sweet voice". The West seems not to be ready or does not think it is necessary to develop or to change its own political rhetoric in light of the rhetorical landscape developed by Lukashenka.

Notes:

[1] Mitchell, W., Kramer, D. (eds.). (2011). Democratic Change in Belarus: A Framework for Action. Washington: Center of European Policy Analysis. P.9.

[2] Anderson, R. (1998). Pragmatic Ambiguity and Partisanship in Russia's Emerging Democracy. In: De Landtsheer, C., Feldman, O. (eds.). Politically Thinking. A Worldwide Examination of Language Used in the Public Sphere. London. Praeger. P. 64 – 78.

[3] Lukashenka, A. (2006). The President A.Lukashenka's message to the Belarusian people and National Assembly. Accessed (20 October 2011). Accessed (20 October 2011). http://law.sb.by/451

***Solvita Denisa Liepniece** — PhD. candidate at the University of Latvia, visiting researcher at the University of Antwerp. Her research interests cover intercultural and political communication.*

MEDIA WATCH

Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship

By Andrew Wilson

Book review by Kiryl Kascian and Hanna Vasilevich

The recently published "*Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship*" (Yale University Press, 2011) by Andrew Wilson has received substantial attention. Wilson's interest in Belarus dates back to the second half of the 1990s when he published his book chapter "Myths of national history in Belarus and Ukraine" in G. Hosking and G. Schöpflin (eds.) *Myths and nationhood* (Hurst & Co., 1997). In this chapter, he compared the capacity and credibility of national myths in Belarus and Ukraine. He argued that while Ukrainian national myths are not very solemn and stable, the difficulty for Belarusian national mythology is that "it has proved extremely difficult to displace all the pan-Slavonic and Soviet myths, without a powerful rival myth of anterior statehood or religious exceptionalism" (p. 197), leaving Belarus practically without "useful legitimation sources" (p. 197) for claiming its nation's long-standing historical statehood. He also argued that this nation has "no obvious polity to celebrate before the twentieth century" and therefore "[t]o establish a tradition of statehood in the medieval period… the Belarusians have to displace Lithuanian historiography, claiming that the state established by Mindoŭh… was in fact a Belarusian, not a Lithuanian, state…" (p. 188). Therefore, according to Wilson, a separate Belarusian identity has little space to develop between Roman Catholic Poles and Lithuanians and Orthodox Russians (p. 189). On the basis of this apparent insufficiency of "a narrative of separate Belarusian development" Wilson concluded that "[t]he Belarusian "Golden Age" failed to set Belarus off on a path that diverged from the Russian cultural tradition in the long term" (p. 193). Thus, Wilson treats Belarusians as an exclusively Soviet formation with the alien pre-Soviet history bringing Belarus within the Russian cultural space.

More than ten years passed before Andrew Wilson returned to the Belarusian theme, this time producing a substantial piece of work devoted exclusively to Belarus. In the very first sentence of his book Wilson refers to the Western ignorance of Belarus' existence claiming that almost no one in the Western world knows about the existence of any state between Poland and Russia referring even to Grant's "*EU 2010: An optimistic vision of the future*" in which Belarus is once again seen as part of Russia.

The formulation of the book's title *Belarus: The Last European Dictatorship* seems to be chosen to make this product attractive on the book market. The market-oriented commercialised approach of this title may be read in the book jacket where the book it presented as "the first in English to explore Belarus's complicated road to nationhood and to examine in detail its politics and economics since 1991." This advertisement ignores the following books published since 1991: Jan Zaprudnik, *Belarus at a crossroads in history* (Westview Press, 1993), David Marples, *Belarus: a denationalized nation* (Harwood, 1999), Nelly Bekus, *Struggle over identity: the official and the alternative 'Belarusianness'* (CEU Press, 2010). Oddly enough, all these books are cited by Andrew Wilson in his work.

The book is divided into two parts. The first part is aimed at providing a thorough overview of the Belarusian history up to independence. The second part is focused on its modern history and seeks to explain three major questions: how Lukašenka came to power, how he has maintained his authoritarian regime up to the present, and concluding with "why Lukašenka" which attempts to explain the Belarusian president's popularity and political viability.

The second part (except for chapter 7) is characterized by a well-designed structure and a thorough analysis based on a substantial bibliography including a wide range of memoirs by Belarusian politicians, as well as studies produced by Belarusian and foreign political analysts, and provides answers to the questions set in it. Lukašenka is portrayed as a protest vote character who, contrary to another protest candidate Paźniak, a "conservative authority figure", exploited the Soviet past to meet the aspirations of the majority of ordinary people (p. 160). His political longevity is explained through the effective exploitation and modernization of the major authoritarian institutions that had already existed under Kiebič (p. 167), the reintroduction of the state-run planned economy, and the gradual cleaning of the national political scene at the legal, personal and institutional levels, which led to the consolidation of authoritarian power in the president's hands. Lukašenka's populist style was also accompanied by substantial improvement in living standards and population incomes compared to the first years of independence (pp. 242-3).

The first part (we would attribute Chapter 7 to this part for the purposes of this review), however, that deals with depicting the history of Belarus, raises more questions than answers, especially considering author's specialization in the history of Eastern Europe.

First of all, the historical part lacks any primary sources and is based almost exclusively on the secondary sources. Additionally, despite the initial goal to provide a thorough overview of Belarusian history, Wilson often cites small stories or facts that distract the reader from the central point. Thus, the simplicity and superficial nature of the text dominate the contents whilst the thorough analysis necessary for a comprehensive understanding of certain facts and events is often left aside. For instance, the description of Branislaŭ Taraškievič's personality (p. 124) does not provide an explanation of the peculiarities of his codification of the Belarusian language, its assets and weaknesses, fate and influence for the further development of the Belarusian language. Instead, the facts of Branislaŭ Taraškievič's arrests by Polish authorities as a spy are mentioned. Similarly, the creation of the Belarusian SSR (pp. 96-105) is presented in a schematic and superficial way without mentioning certain key personalities (such as Miasnikov) and political developments (the rivalry between Miasnikov's group and Belarusian national-communists). Additionally, this chapter does not explain

the factor of the impact of evacuation of the civilian population and the subsequent change of national character of the region on the capacity and potential opportunities of the Belarusian national movement. Another example is the presentation of national issues, interethnic relations and relevant statistics interpreted from both a historical and contemporary perspective (pp. 121-2). Only certain data and facts are provided, while an explanation of the relevant state policies that led to such results is lacking.

Additionally, the author tries to represent not only Belarusian but also its neighbors' version of Belarusian history. However, this approach seems to be harmful to the very idea of this book since the Belarusian interpretation of the nation's history influences the political choices Belarusians have made during the last 20 years as history became more open, and to some extent determines the direction of the development of Belarusian society. Hence, the author's choice to present the variety of different interpretations of Belarusian history (including the versions of its neighbors) suppresses the very Belarusian version, making it secondary and thus trapping himself and the reader between different names and events. Thus, in certain cases the names of certain events, groups, personalities or things are muddled, misspelled, misinterpreted or referred to differently in different parts of the text. The most significant error is the collapsing of the *Dryhavičians*, one of the ancient Slavic tribes that formed Belarusian ethnic kin, with the Derevlyans (*Derevliany*), one of the ancient Slavic tribes of the territory of current Ukraine, and the description of the latter's history instead of the former's (p. 15). Among the examples of improper spelling there are: the name of the Grand Duke Giedymin is misspelled both in Belarusian and Polish (p. 23), and the name of the Grand Duke Vitaŭt is said to be given in its Belarusian variant but is actually provided in Polish (p. 24). Other examples of misspelling are: *krayovtsi*, *prosta mova*, *meshanka*, *kostol*, etc. Such a muddle with names has some other consequences in understanding Belarusian history by the reader. The names of prominent historical figures of the GDL are provided in their Lithuanian versions (Mindaugas, Jogaila, Vaišelga, Albertas Goštautas) and their Belarusian names are ignored, even though the primary sources, which are lacking in this part's bibliography contain the Belarusian variants of these names. This practice makes these prominent people (i.e. Mindoŭg, Jagajla, Vojšalk, Albrecht Gaštold) foreign to Belarusian history and eliminates them from the Belarusian historical narrative. As a result, Wilson's attempt to show the wider context of Belarusian history is not a shrewd choice since the different interpretations do not help the ordinary reader to get an in-depth understanding of the offered context and does not allow the reader to perceive the real importance of this particular event or personality for Belarus and its history.

To produce such a solid work, it seems that a certain substantial reassessment of the previous interpretation of the available historical materials was necessary. But the book does not seem to have completely accomplished this end since its author still demurs and does not develop a strong opinion that the Belarusian vision of history despite all its shortcomings and apparent non-attractiveness remains a milestone for the development of Belarusian society. Moreover, despite the differences between what is called official and alternative interpretations of history, in regard to the search of the nation's "Golden Age" they largely compromise on the role of the GDL. However, despite referring to the Belarusian vision of what the GDL was, Wilson asserts that in Belarusian society the GDL past "has little contemporary resonance" (p. 138) and sees Belarusians as a product of the 20th century. Instead of finding the linkage between the role of the past in the nation's present, Wilson immediately refers to the neighbors' versions of history and thus unintentionally questions the maturity of the Belarusian national narrative and recalls his own approach from some ten years ago ("The relative tolerance for east Slavic culture shown by the early Lithuanians meant the Rus initially did not have to develop an identity in adversity." (p. 34) or "Unlike in later eras, eastern Slavs dominated the urban population, but not in every city — Vilna had a Ruthenian quarter in the north-east of the city." (p. 39). Moreover, while showing the multiethnic population of the Belarusian territory in Chapter 7, Wilson veiledly asserts the still unfinished formation of Belarusians as a nation. Thus, as some ten years ago, he tries to show the weakness of the Belarusian identity existing exclusively within the Russian cultural space, while emphasizing that "East Slavic identities are vague and overlapping" (pp. 121-2). Moreover, an unintential questioning by Wilson of the Belarusian ethnic kin's ability to assimilate minorities within the Belarusian national state (which the Republic of Belarus is both according to the law and population structure) may be observed (ibid.). Hence, his Chapter 7 fails to point out the building blocks of Belarusian identity and does not serve as a bridge between the first and the second parts of the book.

Additionally, the author attempts to speculate on certain issues of the Belarusian society, for instance on the religious factor or civilization division, exaggerating their actual importance. Thus, in his assertion on the vision of the past by Belarusian nationalists who are "frustrated by historical counterfactuals" and thus seek for "compensation in absolutes", he argues that "the idea of a pseudoimperical Belarus founding Litva, driving back Muscovy, reaching the seas and stretching out between them has little contemporary resonance." (p.138). Moreover, he argues that that was the idea that "a militantly Catholic" Zianon Paźniak would have tried to implement should he have won the presidential elections of 1994. It is Wilson's view that going back to the roots in this way would have split the nation even more than Lukašenka's policies and would have potentially lead to heavy tensions with Russia on a civilizational basis, which Wilson believes to be "absurdly ahistorical" (ibid.). Such a labelling approach is quite an extrapolation, which is typical of neighboring countries (ex. Poland or Russia) where religion is quite a consolidating factor. Wilson selects such quotations and facts in a way to prove his personal conclusion without giving any reference as to how it really works.

In his attempt to confront the diametrally opposed approaches of Paźniak and Lukašenka, Wilson argues that the latter propagated for Belarus the role of a "Slavic forepost" and speculates with the example of the "Stalin Line" treating it as a "Russian redoubt". As he rightfully points out, though, the "Stalin Line" does not have the history that the Belarusian state attributes to it. The author ignores the fact that the "Stalin Line" is being treated by Lukašenka as a part of the depicting the heroic struggle of the Belarusian nation and its particular role in stopping the Nazi aggression and saving the Soviet people, if not all of Europe from the Nazi threat. Hence, paradoxically Lukašenka's vision is not pro-Russian, as Wilson argues, but similar to Paźniak's Belarus-centric approach, but with different emphases and myths.

One should praise the author's attempt to use Belarusian forms for geographic and personal names throughout the text, even though in the LOC form. However, reference to the language does not go further than the brief description of "three versions of the Belarusian language": *taraškievica, narkamaŭka* and *trasianka*. However, the author somehow misses the point that the Belarusian state treats all of these as varieties of the same language, but the issue is the unified approach to transformation of the vernacular into written texts. Moreover, Wilson somehow omits *lacinka* referring to it only in the context of Jan Stankievič's unsuccessful attempts to adopt the Latin alphabet as the primary alphabet of the Belarusian language (p. 124). Even then. since Stankievič considered the Cyrillic alphabet as primary, this referenced statement is based on an erroneous premise. However, *lacinka*, though in a slightly modernized form, has gained official recognition by the Belarusian state for use in the transliteration of the geographic names of Belarus and thus has become indirectly recognized by the state as an important element in the richness of the Belarusian language. However, the omission of this fact by Wilson seems to be a significant shortcoming in understanding both the linguistic legacy of the Belarusian language and its potential capacities for further development within Belarusian society. Thus, even though Wilson uses Belarusian transliteration of personal and geographic names and strives to find the most appropriate script for transferring Belarusian sounds and writing, the lack of references to *lacinka* seems a considerable shortcoming in the development of this theme by the author.

In addition to the shortcomings mentioned above, the book contains also a number of small errors such as improper citing (for instance, the book by M.Dolbilov and A.Miller (eds.) *Zapadnye okrainy Rossiyskoy imperii.* Historia Rossica (Moscow, 2006), Z. Šybieka. *Narys historyi Bielarusi (1795-2002)* (Minsk, 2003), or V. Bulhakaŭ et al. *Palityčnaja historyja niezaležnaj Bielarusi* (Vilnius, 2006), or the evidently erroneous caption to the photo No. 8 of the SS. Symon and Alena Church in Minsk (the picture contains the caption "Scene of the demonstrations in December 2010" whereas the photo depicts summer time and derives apparently from the 1980s since the crosses are still absent from the top of the church).

Despite all these shortcomings the book by Andrew Wilson embodies a huge and needed work to promote Belarusian studies in the West. Moreover, its importance is in the author's attempt to bring together history and political science and thus to link the past and present of Belarus, while recognizing that the book needs corrections, and its first part and Chapter 7 require serious revision. . .

We would like to hope that in a revised version of Andrew Wilson's book these shortcomings will be eliminated, so that the work would become a most valuable contribution to Belarusian studies produced in the West by Western authors.

BELARUSIAN REVIEW (ISSN 1064-7716)

Published by Belarusan-American Association, Inc.
a fraternal non-profit association

Founder and Editor/Publisher (1989-2001):
Joe Arciuch

Editor: George Stankevich

Deputy Editor: Jan Maksymiuk

Assistant Editor: Hanna Vasilevich

Editor-At-Large: Joe Arciuch

Web site Editor: Kiryl Kaścian

Contributing Editors: Ethan Burger, Paul Goble, Hanna Vasilevich, Kiryl Kaścian, David Marples, David Kramer, Joe Price, Jan Zaprudnik, Aliaksiej Dajlidaŭ

Copy Editors: Steve Stankievich, Natalia Rusak, Maria Kiehn

Production: George Stankevich

Publisher: Walter Stankievich

Circulation: Vital Alisiyonak, Dzmitry Kazak

Treasurer: Serge Tryhubovich

U.S.A. : BELARUSIAN REVIEW
P.O. Box 1347, Highland Park, NJ 08904
E-mail: belarusianreview@hotmail.com
Tel/fax: (001) 732 222 1951

Europe : BELARUSIAN REVIEW
Malesicka ul. 553/65
108 00 Praha 10, Czech Republic
E-mail: jurka.stan@gmail.com
Tel: (420) 274 771 338, (420) 774 613 356

BELARUSIAN REVIEW is registered in Europe
with Czech Ministry of Culture
Registration No. MK ČR E 13311

Publication Date: January 2012

Printed by:
in Czech Republic —Tiskárna OFF Studio,
101 00 Praha 10
in the United States —JAMM Printing,
Long Branch, N.J., 07740

Annual subscription rate in 2011:
$45 for individuals, $65 for institutions
payable by check or money order in US funds
to: BELARUSIAN REVIEW or BR
P.O. Box 1347, Highland Park, NJ 08904, USA

ON-LINE: http://www.belarusianreview.org
Archival issues may be also downloaded
from this Web site.